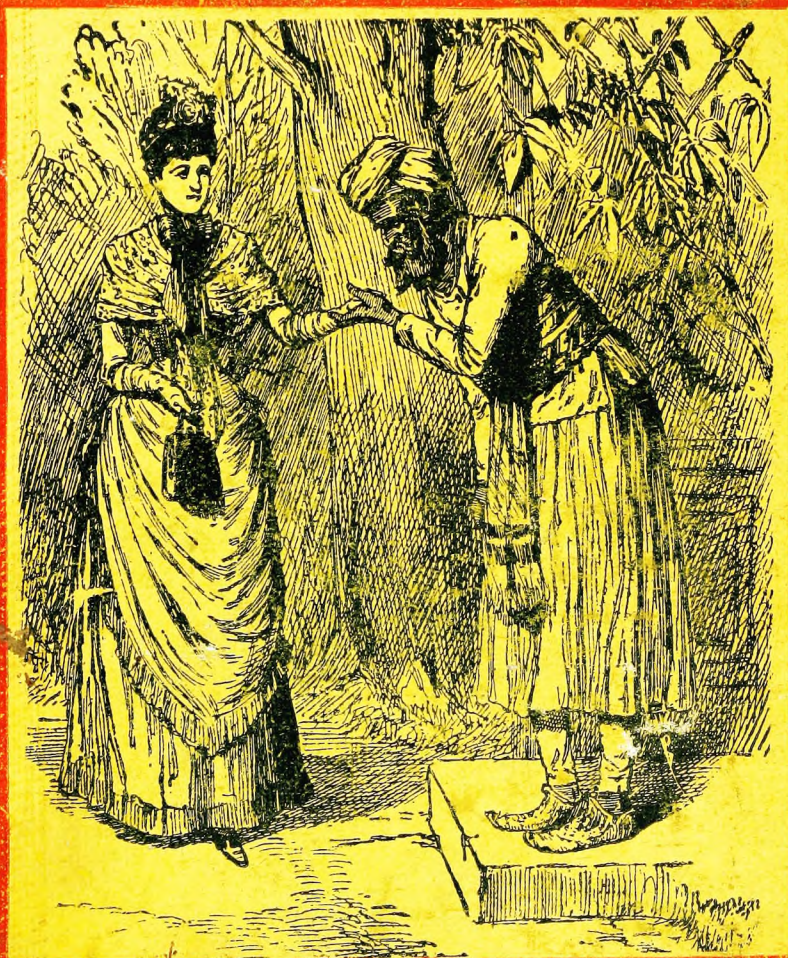


FROM THE BOSOM OF THE DEEP

BY J. E. MUDDOCK



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FROM THE BOSOM OF
THE DEEP

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BY

J. E. MUDDOCK,

AUTHOR OF "A WINGLESS ANGEL," "AS THE SHADOWS FALL,"
"JOHN JELLABY'S HOUSEKEEPER," ETC.

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FROM THE BOSOM OF THE DEEP

CHAPTER I.

ON BOARD THE *PEARL*.

IT was a sullen, ashen, roaring morning, towards the end of February, when the good ship *Pearl* was lying-to under a close-reefed maintopsail in the Bay of Bengal. The *Pearl* was a large, full-rigged ship of nearly two thousand tons register, and she was owned by Duncan & Pivot of Liverpool. She had left Calcutta a fortnight previously with a full miscellaneous cargo, and fair complement of passengers of a very mixed class. The *Pearl* was bound for London, and was commanded by Captain Walter Judson, a man who was every inch a sailor; the chief mate was a Scotchman by the name of Archibald Stobo, the second was a Frederick Merrell; and in addition she carried a third mate, a surgeon, a boatswain, and thirty-seven hands before the mast.

The ship was well appointed and well found in every respect. She was one of a line that had for years been established as regular traders between England and India.

The surgeon of the *Pearl* was a Mr. Lancelot Aemilius Shadwell, a young man who was making his first voyage to sea. He had joined the ship in Liverpool, from whence she had sailed, having been recommended to go for the benefit of his health. Doctor Shadwell was a good-looking man, of dark complexion. There was a languidness about his dark eyes that seemed to indicate a naturally indolent and dreary disposition, though when under the influence of excitement his face lighted up with a restless animation. He was a passionate man, and there were times when those who

studied him could not help feeling that there were in his nature the elements of cruelty.

Doctor Shadwell was one of the class of men who, while not displaying any particular ability for a particular thing, are yet voted "clever." He seemed to have a fair knowledge of his profession, he had read a good deal, and having a retentive memory he was enabled to appear well-informed; he sketched a little, played fairly well, had a carefully trained voice that he knew how to use, was an excellent and graceful dancer, and spoke French and German fluently, though with a pronounced British accent. Added to these accomplishments was a certain suavity of manner, and he seemed to have studied the art of being agreeable to women. There were two weak points, however, in his character that, according to his female critics, almost quite outweighed his good qualities. He had a passion for gambling, a passion that betrayed itself on the most trivial pretext; and he hated—or professed to hate—children. His propensity for speculation had led him into some difficulties during the voyage, as he had lost pretty heavily at cards. Amongst the passengers was a young widow lady—a Mrs. Blanche Vavasour. She had gone out to India to be married to Lieutenant Vavasour, two years previously. They had not been acquainted very long, but were much in love with each other, and as there seemed no likelihood of his being able to come to her for a time, she had, much against the wishes of her friends, gone to him. She had had one child that had only lived a few weeks; and six months before our story opens Lieutenant Vavasour had succumbed to exposure and hardship while engaged on staff duty in the Punjaub.

With this little history it was but natural that the young widow should be an object of interest and attraction; but she had something beyond this to recommend her to notice. She was as yet little more than a girl, not having completed her twenty-fourth year. She was petite in stature, with a graceful, pliant figure, and a most winning face. She had fair hair, and a great deal of it; soft blue eyes, and a delicate, fresh complexion. Women called her pretty, men said she was beautiful; and beautiful she assuredly was, for there were an archness and winsomeness about her that were irresistible, and these were allied to a bright disposition and

a quick intelligence. Besides the Government pension she was entitled to through her husband having died in the service, Mr. Vavasour had left her fairly well provided for, something like five hundred a year, it was said, and in addition to this his life had been insured for two thousand pounds.

These facts had soon leaked out amongst the little community on board the ship, and Mrs. Vavasour found herself an object of much interest and gossip on the part of the ladies, and of chivalric-like attention on the part of the gentlemen. It was noticed however—and the ladies spoke of it flippantly, and even with some indignation, though heaven knows why—that if she showed partiality for one man more than another that man was Doctor Shadwell. It had been spitefully remarked, and it is needless to say the remark was a feminine one, that “that man follows the little widow about like her shadow.” Some explanation of this partiality on her part was perhaps to be found in the fact that she had known him for over six weeks. She had come down to the ship to inspect her when the *Pearl* first arrived, before deciding whether she would take her passage in her or not. She was invited by the captain to remain on board for luncheon, and so it came about that she was introduced to the doctor. He made himself very agreeable that afternoon, and as he happened to be going on shore when she and her friends took their leave, he accompanied them, and before parting received an invitation from her friends, as some return for his politeness, to call the next day.

An acquaintanceship thus sprang up, the doctor taking every opportunity to improve it, so that when they came together as fellow-travellers in the same vessel it was not as strangers, but rather as friends.

Mrs. Vavasour was not the only widow on board, but she was the youngest and fairest of the lot, and consequently came in for the lion's share of masculine admiration. There were about thirty gentlemen altogether, and they included some three or four military officers, a merchant or two, a doctor going home invalided, a lawyer, and an Indian judge.

The *Pearl* had towed down the Hooghly as far as the Sandheads, where, parting with the tug and the pilot, she had spread her white wings to a favouring gale, and sailed out into the steel-blue ocean.

For some days she had enjoyed good weather and made excellent progress, being enabled to carry royals and studding-sails. The royals and studding-sails, however, had been gradually taken in as the breeze freshened and gave indications of a change. The change came in the shape of a violent squall, which had carried away the maintop-gallant-sail and the forestay-sail. The squall was succeeded by a lull, and was followed by a furious gale from the south-east, and the *Pearl* had been obliged to lay-to under a double-reefed maintop-sail.

Those who know the Bay of Bengal best will know what a tremendous sea a south-east gale brings up. The waves rose in great rounded billows that, curling as they reached their ultimate height, their crests were cut off by the fierce wind and sent flying through the air in the form of spume. The sky was of a sepia tint, save to the east, where there was a great splotch of blood red. The steel colour of the heaving water was relieved by the emerald of the curling wave-crests and the great patches of snowy, hissing foam. The *Pearl* was a well-built vessel, having a sharp bow that cut the rollers in two as, rising for a few moments until her fore-foot was clear out of the water and her bright, wet copper shone like burnished steel, she made a great plunge, putting her bowsprit clean under, taking the broken wave over her fo'ksle with a swish, until it swept on to the main-deck and poured through the scupper-holes with a roar. Then the ship would fall off a point or two in the hissing field of flaky foam she had made, and having recovered from the shock she would come up again, rising on to her stern, and then like a thing of life plunging once more at the on-coming wave.

There was a tremendous strain on her spars and rigging, and the sheaves in the blocks seemed to shriek with pain, and the parrals and trusses groaned with every motion. The weather-shrouds and stays were rigid as iron, while those to leeward swayed about with every roll and plunge of the huge vessel. One moment she lay upon her beam in the trough of the sea, with her wet, glistening side to windward exposed far below the second line of copper sheathing, until with a mighty effort she sped, as it seemed, with a rush up the glassy incline of a great wave, and quivering from stem to stern on its crest as if shaking herself free from the grip of

the water, she dived down once more, describing as she went the segment of a circle with her jibboom as if turning on a pivot, and as she came down her reefed topsail flapped to the mast for an instant, and then bellied out again like the breast of a swan, straining at the sheets and boltropes until it seemed as if they must part.

Captain Judson, clad in heavy sea-boots and oilskin, with his sou'-wester batted down on his head, stood on the poop keeping an anxious eye on the spars and sail as the ship heaved and fell; and turning occasionally to the four men at the wheel to tell them to "luff, luff," or "let her go off a point," or "keep her up, lads."

His face was anxious as, sheltered behind a weather tarpauling that had been rigged in the mizzen shrouds, he peered forth over the wild waste of surging ocean, with its valleys and mountains; but there was no sign of any break in the weather. The air was thick with flying spume, and to windward all was as hard as steel, while in the sepia sky there was never a gleam to tell that the gale was blowing itself out. Up in the foretop one of the hands was stationed, and he searched the dark horizon for a rift, but could find none.

The mate was moving about in the waist, where in the shelter of one of the deckhouses the watch were huddled, ready on the instant to obey the slightest order. Mr. Stobo was a big, powerful man, with a handsome, weather-beaten face, and a long brown beard that was now dripping with the salt spray, like a sea lion's mane. Now and again he ventured to peep over the weather-rail, but the spume lashed him in the face and drove him back again.

Presently he was attracted by a cry from the look-out in the fore-top, but the wind drowned the man's voice, so that it was difficult to hear what he said.

"What do you say?" roared the mate in stentorian tones, making a trumpet of his hands.

"A vessel to leeward, sir; about four points on the starboard bow," roared back the man.

"What do you make her out?" cried the mate.

"I think her masts have gone," answered the man as, standing up in the top, he clung with one hand to the weather-to'-gallant shrouds, and shaded his eyes with the other hand. "She seems to have a signal flying," he added.

"What is it, what is it?" roared the captain, anxiously, as he saw by the action of the look-out that something was absorbing his attention. The man could not hear the question though the mate did, and creeping along under the shelter of the rail he mounted the poop ladder.

"What is it, Mr. Stobo; anything wrong?" cried the captain.

"The look-out reports a vessel to leeward with a signal flying, sir," Mr. Stobo shouted, with his mouth close to the captain's ear, for the bellowing of wind and waves made it almost impossible for one to hear.

"Where away?" inquired the captain.

"About four points on the starboard bow, sir."

"Jump in the mizzen-top, Mr. Stobo, and see what you can make of her."

The mate went to the saloon companion-way, and opening the door took a telescope from the slings on the top of the stairs. Then he got over the rail on the weather side; and mounted the rattlings that were all a-taut, until he gained the top. He took a turn with his arm round one of the topgallant shrouds, and adjusting the glass swept the wild waste of heaving waters. It was some moments before he could discover anything until the *Pearl* mounted to the crest of a seething billow, and before she plunged again the mate saw what he was looking for.

"Do you see anything?" shouted the captain.

The mate waited for a minute until the *Pearl* mounted once more and he was enabled to assure himself; then he answered back, roaring through his hand, and bending his head down,

"A vessel with her fore and main topmasts gone and a signal of distress flying in the mizzen rigging."

"How does she bear?" cried Captain Judson, as he sprang on the rail and clung to the rattlings.

"About nor'-west and by west-half-west, sir."

"Let her go off a little, boys," said the captain, as he stepped on to the deck again, and addressing the men at the wheel. Then going to the break of the poop, he roared at the top of his voice to the watch, "Lay aft here, men. Get a pull on your weather main and topsail braces. Ease off to leeward, steadily. Watch your chance. Now then, haul away."

With a great pull the men brought the yards round, and as the vessel felt the furious wind in her strained sail she tore down into the trough of the sea, and then flew up a green hill, plunging down the other side and smothering herself in a great sheet of flying foam, while the water sped from under her counter in a boiling white mass. "Keep her steady, keep her steady, men," shouted the captain to the helmsmen as she showed a tendency to twist up into the wind again. Then to the watch, "Stand by there to haul in your lee braces."

The *Pearl* feeling the force of the gale on her quarter, strained and rolled and pitched furiously in the troughs, seeming, as it were, to fling herself down until her whole mighty bulk quivered with the exertion, and shaking off the water she tore forward again through the blinding salt mist.

"How does she bear now?" cried the skipper to the mate,

"Dead ahead, sir—about five miles."

The minutes passed. They were anxious and exciting ones. The *Pearl* had got way on her, and was sending the sea over her in sheets. Where the red streak was in the east, the sun broke forth through the glary atmosphere and gave a metallic lustre to the hills of water that heaved in the lines of light.

As the *Pearl* came nearer to the wreck the mate was enabled to make her out. He saw that her weather bulwarks were beaten in, and her broken bowsprit and jibboom, held by the shrouds and stays, were dashing against her bows; while blown out by the wind until it was rigid as a board, the British ensign, Jack downwards, was seized to the mizzen shrouds.

"She seems to be an abandoned vessel, sir," he shouted, "of about nine hundred tons."

"How far is she off now, Mr. Stobo?"

"Two miles, I should say, sir."

The captain kept the *Pearl* on her quivering course for another ten minutes, until his strained eyes caught sight of the vessel as lying over until more than half her wet side was exposed, she flashed on the summit of a wave and then dived into the trough again.

"Come down, Mr. Stobo," he cried; then turning to the men at the wheel, "Luff, luff," and to the watch, "Haul in your lee

braces there. Slack away to windward, slack away, slack away. Now then bear a hand; luff her, men, luff—steady. Belay—that.”

The *Pearl* came up into the wind again, and as she rose on the heaving sea, the wreck could be plainly seen, with that mute appeal for help in the shape of the reversed ensign which no true sailor would ever pass unheeded.

“Do you think there is anyone aboard?” he asked, as his mate came to his side.

“I don’t know, sir. There are no signs; but the crew could hardly have left the vessel in such a sea as this.”

“Call the watch below on deck,” cried the captain.

One of the men ran forward to the forecandle door, and shouted, “All hands on deck.”

In a few moments the men came tumbling out, putting on their oilskins and sou’-westers as they came.

“Get the lifeboat cleared for lowering, boatswain,” said Captain Judson, “and some of you volunteer to man her,”

Each man shouted readily,

“I’ll go, sir, I’ll go.”

“I shall want some of you here,” returned the captain, with a feeling of pride in his sailors who were so willing to risk their lives in daring the mad sea. “Will you go in the boat, Mr. Stobo?” he asked, as he turned to his mate.

“With pleasure, sir,” was the quick answer.

“Pick your men and get her into the water, then.”

The boat was a patent tubular lifeboat, with patent lowering gear. She was swung inboard, but in less than a minute the crew had slewed her round on the davits and she was hanging over the side.

The mate called eight men by their names, and those who were not called looked disappointed. These men and the mate got into the boat, and took their seats on the thwarts with their oars apeak.

Then the rest of the crew stood by watching for the moment until the roll of the *Pearl* brought the boat’s keel almost to the water, when, seizing the opportunity, the grips were loosed, and the boat shot down the side of the hill and was buried in the trough.

CHAPTER II.

AN OCEAN WAIF.

THE men bent to their oars with a will, and the sea swept the boat clear of the vessel in a few seconds, and when she rose the wreck could be plainly seen right ahead.

It was a bold and daring thing for those brave men to undertake to wrestle with such a sea in a small boat. But what will sailors not do when they think there is a human life to be saved ! One moment they were flung up to the sky, and the next they were falling through the air, so it seemed, and towering all round them were walls of black water. Then some huge billow rose with a roar, and curling its crest into an emerald green fringe it threatened to come on top of them, but the gallant boat lifted with the swell and topped the wave, sliding down on the other side. With consummate skill the mate steered the little craft, keeping her clear of the roaring monsters, and encouraging his men with his hearty voice.

“Now, boys, let her have it. Altogether now. Bend to it, lads.”

And the noble fellows, drenched and dripping with the salt spray, did bend to it with the rhythmical motion of a piece of mechanism, until at last as the boat rose from the trough the mate saw that they were close to the wreck, which was lying over and exposing her side glistening like steel, while the spume was flying across her in sheets.

Mr. Stobo put his hand to his mouth and bawled, “Anyone on board there?”

The voice was caught up by the fierce wind and borne over the vessel, but no answer was returned. She was a small barque, painted black. Her weather bulwarks from the poop to the fore-castle were completely torn away ; the deckhouse had been washed

overboard, and her deck was cumbered with wreck. Again the mate shouted as the boat was swept nearer, and then suddenly he exclaimed,

"God in heaven, there's a woman. Pull, men, pull with a will."

He had caught sight of a human face. Well might he exclaim, "God in heaven," for the sight was awful. It was a woman's face, a face ghastly and white with a look of frozen horror upon it, and the eyes starting from the head. A mass of long black hair was streaming out in the wind, and her neck and bosom were bare.

The mate jammed his tiller down so as to bring the boat up into the wind, until he had the wreck astern; then he swept round and came under the lee of the vessel, and hailed her again, but no answer was returned, and the owner of the face had disappeared.

"We must get aboard, lads, somehow," he said to his men. "Watch your chance now to lay her alongside. Steady, boys, steady. Pull your port oars there. Gently to starboard. Now then, look out. Peak your oars, lads. Brown and Tomkins, stand by to jump on board; here, Taylor, take the tiller. Keep her clear of the side. Now, now's your time!"

The boat had been cleverly placed alongside of the mizzen chains, and at the signal the two men and the mate sprang and caught the chains as only seamen could. As the barque rolled to windward they were lifted high in the air, and they saw their boat far below them, but before the wreck rolled to leeward again they had swung themselves up and were on the deck.

"Barque, ahoy!" hailed the mate; but no answer was returned.

The deck was littered with top hamper and torn rigging. Broken spars were lying about mingled with broken furniture, rent sails, and a bewildering tangle of cordage.

"Go forward, men; I'll go aft," said Mr. Stobo, as he commenced to pick his way cautiously over the débris.

The barque was built with a monkey poop, with an entrance door on both sides. The lee door was blocked with wreckage, but the weather one was partly clear, and Mr. Stobo crawled through it. The passage inside was lumbered up with broken boxes and furniture, but he got over them and entered the cuddy. He paused and listened. He heard nothing but the rasping of the mast, the

groaning of the timbers, and the dripping of the water through the broken skylight.

"Is anybody here?" he shouted, but only the echo of his own voice answered him.

What did this mean? Was the face he had seen a delusion? Had he looked upon a spirit, and not a thing of flesh and blood?

Brave man as he was, there was something in the ominous silence that startled him. The vessel, evidently light, jumped about like a cork, and he had a difficulty in keeping his feet. He knew there was no time to waste, for the boat with the six men in it was exposed to great peril, so he must solve the mystery at once. The cabin was awash with the water, that rushed like a milldam from side to side every time the ship rolled. With difficulty he made his way aft, and gained the state-room, the door of which was shut. Then he was startled by a cry, not the cry of an adult, but a child. There was no mistaking it, although it was faint and weak. The cry came from the state-room. He turned the handle, but the door would not open. It was evidently jammed. He put his broad shoulders to it, and with one lunge forced it, and then a sight met his that appalled him. Lying half in and half out of the bunk, and only partly dressed, was a woman, and a baby was clutching at her naked breast.

He put his arms round her and lifted her up, but she hung limp in his arms. Her face was like marble, and from her lips oozed blood-stained froth. Her long hair, sodden and dank with sea water, fell about her naked shoulders, clinging to them like seaweed. He had seen the face before. It was the one that had peered over the rail as the boat approached. He laid the poor creature down, and placed his hand on her heart to see if it had ceased to beat; but she was alive, for she wearily opened her glassy eyes, and looked at him with a despairing, mute appeal.

He rushed out of the cabin and sung out for his two men. They came running to his call. "There are only two dead sailor-men for'ard," one of them exclaimed.

"Here's a woman and child here alive," said the mate. "We must get them over the side. One of you look round for blankets, or something to wrap the poor creatures in."

He returned to the state-room. The woman had closed her eyes

again and was quite still, so that he once more felt her heart, but it was still beating. He lifted up the child. It was cold and clammy, and its clothes were soaked with the sea. It cried with a little, weak, puling whine that almost made the weather-beaten sailor shed tears. He opened his oilskin, and pressed the tiny thing to his bosom for warmth.

The men discovered some blankets in a locker, and although they were damp and mildewed they were better than nothing. The baby was wrapped in one, the woman in another. Then the mate made a hurried search in the cabin for the ship's papers. But he could not find a trace of anything that would give him the slightest clue as to her name, where she hailed from, or whither she was bound. He hurried, not without great difficulty, to the fore part of the ship. The bulkhead of the forecabin was stove in, and the forecabin itself was filled with wreckage and seamen's chests. Amongst this debris were the dead bodies of two sailors. In the hand of one was a revolver, and in the forehead of the other was a blue mark showing a bullet hole; while a nearer inspection of the man with the revolver revealed the presence of a jack-knife sticking in his bosom near the heart.

Some ghastly tragedy had been enacted here, but what it was would probably never be known until the mighty sea should give up its dead. There was evidence that these two men had killed each other, but they would go down into the deep taking their secret with them. But where were the rest of the crew? Mr. Stobo, knowing how precious the time was and the danger he ran by delay, could only make a hurried search, but it was sufficient to assure him that there was no other living soul on board. There was nothing of value in the cabin. Even the chronometer and barometer had been taken away, and every stitch of clothing. He sent one of his men into the mizzen-top to hail the boat. Fortunately the wind had lulled a little, and the tops of the seas didn't curl so threateningly.

The boat was put alongside with the same skill as before. Mr. Stobo got down into the chains. It was a dangerous position, as the channel was awash, and he ran the risk of being swept off every time the vessel lurched. But he never thought of himself; he was a British sailor, and there were a woman and baby to be saved.

The sailors had rolled the child in a blanket, and swung it in a bowline; and watching their chance they slipped it over to the mate, who passed it to the willing, outstretched hands in the boat. The woman was passed out in the same way, but with infinitely more risk and danger on account of her weight. Then the mate sprang down, and was followed by one of the sailors, but the other one before he could make his spring lost his hold and was washed out of the chains, though ere he had got out of reach Mr. Stobo seized him and dragged him in again.

"Thank Heaven, we have finished that work!" the mate exclaimed, as he took his seat at the tiller and his crew settled to their oars.

They pulled for some time without being able to see the *Pearl*, and they began to fear that they had lost her. Although the sea was running very high, the lull in the wind was greatly in their favour, as the waves curled less. Presently their drooping spirits were revived by a voice coming over the waters—"Pull three points more to starboard," it cried. It was evident they were seen by the look-out on the vessel, although they couldn't yet see the ship. In about ten minutes, however, they caught sight of her as they rose on a billow, and so were able to take their bearings.

It required quite another twenty minutes of hard wrestling with those roaring, hissing waves before they came alongside of the ship, whose decks were now crowded with anxious faces, all the passengers having ventured up from below at the exciting news that the boat had gone away to a wreck. It was a delicate and difficult, not to say dangerous, operation that of getting the boat into the slings again. But as soon as a favourable moment came the grip-hooks were slipped into the rings, and then dozens of willing hands on board walked away with the fall, and the little craft and its precious burden of eleven souls were hoisted in with a run.

Captain Judson grasped his mate's hand and shook it heartily, as the brave fellow stepped out of the boat.

"Thank God, you've returned safe," he murmured, reverently. "But what have you there?" he asked, pointing to the two bundles that the men were lifting out.

"A woman and child," was the answer.

From the crowding passengers who were hustling each other to get a sight a lady managed to free herself. It was Mrs. Vavasour.

With a pitying cry she caught up the blanket in which the child was wrapped, and hurried down to the saloon. She was quickly followed by others bearing the woman.

Doctor Shadwell and the invalid passenger doctor were soon in attendance, and ministering hands rendered ready assistance.

It chanced that both the unfortunate woman and the child were taken to the cabin of Mrs. Vavasour, that lady being the occupant of one of the largest cabins in the saloon; and her cabin having an unoccupied bunk in it she made a request that it might be utilized. She was very anxious to have something to absorb her attention and occupy her time with, and nursing the mother and child, for it was obvious that they were mother and child, was just the thing she wanted.

The child proved to be a very fine boy, about a year and nine months old; but it was plain that he was exhausted by exposure and want of food. The poor mother was a singularly good-looking young woman, with black hair and olive complexion. She was emaciated, however, and in such a fearfully weakened condition that the two doctors expressed doubts as to their being able to pull her through. She opened her eyes occasionally, but there was such a wild light in them that it was clear her brain had been affected by the awful suffering she had gone through. Sometimes her lips moved, but no words issued, and not even a groan.

Mrs. Vavasour, with the help of some other ladies, hastened to strip the sodden rags from the unfortunate creature's body. As they did so they found, tied round her waist and under her petticoat, an ordinary waterproof sponge bag, securely fastened at its mouth by a piece of tape. By the feel the bag seemed to be stuffed with papers or letters. There was no time then to examine the contents, so the "little widow" hung the bag on a hook in the bulkhead of her room.

The kindly hands of the ladies had soon made the woman more comfortable. Dry clothes were put upon her, and she was wrapped up in blankets, while a few spoonfuls of arrowroot and brandy were poured down her throat; but though warmth came to her and her face lost its marble-like hue, she showed no signs of returning consciousness. In the meantime the baby had been put into a warm bath, clothed in a flannel robe, and placed snugly

in Mrs. Vavasour's bunk, where it had fallen into a sound sleep.

Of course this exciting event of the rescue of the mother and child from the wreck became the all-absorbing topic of conversation amongst the passengers, who in appreciation of the devoted courage and splendid skill on the part of the eight seamen, who in spite of the raging sea had saved the unfortunates from a watery grave, had generously subscribed a handsome sum of money to be divided amongst them, a more substantial acknowledgment being reserved for Mr. Stobo.

Speculation was rife as to who the woman was ; where the ship had come from and where she was going to. The mate reported that in his search he had quite failed to discover on the derelict any clue to her name or destination. He felt sure that she had no cargo on board, but was in ballast, as he had descended a scuttle forward and reached the main-deck, which was quite empty, and that would not have been the case if she had been laden. That there was some mystery about the vessel seemed to the mate to be evident beyond dispute. Firstly, it appeared that special efforts had been made to remove all the ship's papers and everything else that could have led to her identity. Neither the blankets nor the linen bore the ship's name. Secondly, how was it that the two dead men in the fore-castle were there ? They had not been drowned, but one had met his death by a bullet wound, the other by a stab from a knife. Thirdly, what had become of the rest of the crew ? If they had taken to the boats, which the mate noticed were all gone, except the longboat, which was stowed keel up on the spar deck, how was it they had left the woman and child behind ? It seemed almost incredible to suppose that they could have forgotten them, and if they had purposely left them they were then guilty of such terrible cruelty that there must have been some extraordinary motive for it. Fourthly, why had they abandoned the ship ? Although battered and dismasted, her hull seemed perfectly sound, and men who would venture their lives in small boats on a tempest-tossed sea rather than remain on a sound vessel that was well calculated to ride out the storm, were evidently actuated by a purpose that at once suggested itself as vile and base. Fifthly, the mate noticed that there was a strip of new paint on her stern,

where the name under ordinary circumstances would appear. And this strip clearly indicated that the name had, for some sinister reason, been painted out. And lastly, who seized the signal of distress in the mizzen rigging? Men who were moved by criminal motives to desert a ship would hardly have flown such a signal of distress, which was bound to attract the attention of passing vessels.

Mr. Stobo and Captain Judson discussed all these points between themselves; and, as shrewd men and practical seamen, they saw that there was something wrong, something irregular. What it was, was at present a mystery, and the only person at all likely to solve the mystery was the rescued woman; but there was a strong probability, according to the doctors, that she would never recover sufficiently to be able to give anything like a coherent account.

So deeply impressed was Captain Judson with the idea that there was something wrong that he was tempted to set sail on the *Pearl*, go in pursuit of the derelict, and thoroughly overhaul her. It seemed to him as if it were his duty to do this, for the two men who were lying dead there, one stabbed and the other shot, were mute and ghastly witnesses of a tragedy; while the fact of the woman and her child being left on board pointed to a conspiracy. It is probable that this feeling of duty would have prevailed with Captain Judson had not duty nearer home demanded his attention. The slight lull in the wind that the mate had noticed when coming back from the wreck proved to be simply a prelude to a harder blow. The glary sun was now quite hidden, and the blacklead-like lustre of the waves had given place to a bluish black, that was only relieved by the dark green crests and the flashing fields of foam. But the wind now chopped round to a diametrical opposite point, and came down "great guns" from the N.W. As this was a fair wind for the *Pearl* it was not to be lost.

"All hands on deck, and get sail on the ship," cried the captain, as he stepped to the break of the poop. "Shake a reef out of the maintop-sail, there. Set the fore-sail and the foretop-sail. Brace the yards aft. Haul out the spanker. Hoist the mainto'-gallant-sail."

Like a highly-spirited horse that feels the touch of the spur, so sprang the good ship *Pearl* forward under the pressure of the

spread of canvas. Taking green seas over her bows she rushed along at tremendous speed, flying away from the roaring billows that followed, and straining and tugging as if trying to outstrip the wind. Far behind was left the lonely derelict with her ghastly dead, and the mystery that shrouded her was not then to be solved. For it was certain that with such a sea beating upon her battered hull she must break up, and carry her secrets with her into the great deep that never told anything of the strange stories it knew.

CHAPTER III.

“MRS. VAVASOUR’S MYSTERY” SPEAKS.

FOR several days the *Pearl* continued to bowl along before strong gales and high running seas, until she ran into the doldrums near the Line. During this time Mrs. Vavasour found plenty of congenial occupation in attending to her patients, though the baby had so improved and thriven under the kind treatment that it could no longer be said to be a patient. Not so the mother. She seemed to have been shattered, and through all those long days she lay as one stunned. Sometimes she opened her eyes and looked about her inquiringly, but she soon closed them again, as if from a sense of utter weariness.

As yet she had not uttered a word, although there were times when to all appearances she was perfectly conscious. Dr. Shadwell was assiduous in his attentions. He took great interest in the case, and visited the poor woman very frequently. Some of the ladies on board said rather sneeringly that he would not have gone so often if Mrs. Vavasour had not been there. Perhaps this remark arose from jealousy, though it is a fact that he lingered in the cabin much longer than an outsider might have considered necessary, and at these times he seemed to bestow as much attention on Mrs. Vavasour as on the patient whom he jokingly referred to as “Mrs. Vavasour’s mystery.” The lady was very anxious—as indeed everyone on board was—that the unfortunate woman should be able to give some account of herself, and she sat by her bedside and spoke to her often, but no answer was ever returned.

One morning Mrs. Vavasour had dressed the baby, and had taken it on deck. It was fearfully hot weather, and an awning was spread over the poop. The *Pearl* was drifting about in the doldrums, and her sails flapped idly against the masts as she rose

and fell on the glassy swell. From an unclouded sky the sun beat fiercely down on to the oily sea, from whence it was reflected with blinding effulgence. The atmosphere was a-quiver with heat, and nothing broke the mirror-like surface of the water save when the black fin of a shark appeared, or a shoal of flying-fish winged their flight from the maws of the rapacious dolphin. The sun rose in the morning in a crimson and golden glory, and set in the evening in a flood of splendour.

The widow was reclining in a large Indian bamboo chair, and was fanning the baby as it lay crowing upon her lap. The doctor sauntered languidly up to her, and removing his Panama hat as he bowed, he seated himself upon the edge of the cabin skylight, against which her chair was placed.

"Good morning, Mrs. Vavasour," he said. "You are looking very charming this morning. You must have left your cabin early."

"Yes; I found it so insufferably hot."

"I have just been to visit your mystery."

"And how do you find her?"

"Well—about the same," he replied, slowly. Then, after a pause, he said, "Do you know, Mrs. Vavasour, I am strongly of opinion that she is perfectly conscious and able to converse, but for some strange reason won't?"

The widow looked at him inquiringly and curiously.

"Why do you think that, doctor?"

"I have some professional reasons for the opinion and a non-professional one."

"Perhaps you will favour me with the non-professional one?"

"Yes. When I entered your room this morning she was partly sitting up in bed, but as soon as ever she saw me she dropped down again and assumed that dazed condition in which she has been ever since she was brought on board."

"Why do you say assumed, doctor?"

"Because I feel confident it is, or rather was, assumed this morning. I felt her pulse, and found it beating rapidly, as though from excitement."

"Did you speak to her?"

"Yes."

"And she answered you?"

"No."

"Do you think she understood what you said to her?"

"Yes, I am sure of it. Well, that is, almost sure."

"Really, this is very strange," Mrs. Vavasour remarked, as she stared thoughtfully at the shimmering sea.

"It is," he answered.

"But tell me, doctor, why are you almost sure?" the widow asked, with animation.

"There were certain signs in the face that to a professional eye were very significant."

"I will not ask you to explain to me what those signs were, as I might not understand them," Mrs. Vavasour remarked; "but perhaps you will not object to suggest some reason for the woman acting in such an extraordinary manner. A clever man like you would hardly come to a conclusion without trying to justify himself by a process of reasoning."

He removed his hat and bowed again.

"You pay me a compliment," he said, "but, as a matter of fact, I have no reason. It is impossible for me to frame one."

"Do you think the poor creature will recover?" the widow asked, after a pause.

"No."

"Why do you think that?" she said, quickly, and looking at him. "That is a statement that as a professional man you surely have a reason for."

"I have, and my reason is purely a professional one. Constitutionally, I should say, she is not a strong woman. She has evidently suffered hardship and exposure, and I have detected that her heart is affected. In her emaciated and weakened condition this affection is extremely likely to prove fatal."

"I am sorry to hear you say so," Mrs. Vavasour remarked sadly; "sorry for this sweet baby's sake."

"If she dies," said the doctor, "and you learn nothing about her, the disposal of the child will be rather a difficult matter, won't it?"

"No it won't," cried Mrs. Vavasour, with considerable spirit; "not while I live at any rate."

"Indeed, what do I understand by that?"

"That I will be a mother to it."

A look of annoyance came into the doctor's dark face, and his languid eyes fired a little.

"Surely," he said, with a smile, in which there was something of a sneer; "surely, Mrs. Vavasour, a young woman like you, who can fairly hope to marry again, would not think of burdening herself with an unknown child."

"And why not, sir?" she asked, half angrily. "I am a free agent. Moreover, I have never thought of such a thing as a second marriage. My husband is too recently dead for that. But even if I did, the man who would win me must not object to the child."

He took a cigar-case from his pocket and lit a cigar, and as he puffed a volume of smoke into the stagnant air, he said,

"I hope I have not offended you, Mrs. Vavasour."

"Oh, no."

"You say oh, no, as though you meant oh, yes. If my words, somewhat lightly spoken, have given offence, I pray you humbly to accept my apology. Of all people on board the ship I certainly would not offend you."

These words brought a little colour into her pretty face, and she bent over the baby as though wishing to hide from the doctor the fact that he had affected her. But she did not succeed, for his quick eyes noticed it.

"You have not offended me, doctor," she answered.

He moved his hand out and closed his fingers round hers for a brief moment, as he answered,

"I am so glad."

She drew her hand away. It was the first time he had ever done such a thing. She flashed a glance at him, and then dropped her eyes again. And with the evident intention of turning the conversation, she said,

"This heat is so oppressive. Will you be good enough to tell the steward to bring me some lemonade and claret?"

"With pleasure," he answered, as he rose and walked away.

In a few minutes he returned, bringing the lemonade himself.

"Oh, I am so sorry I have troubled you," she said, as she took the glass and touched the lemonade with her lips.

"Nothing that I could do for you, Mrs. Vavasour, would be a trouble to me," he replied, graciously.

She blushed deeply as she looked at him from under drooping eyelids, and she made answer in a subdued tone,

"Really, doctor, I feel very much honoured."

He was annoyed. It was difficult to tell whether her words were sincere or a mere ironical expression. He had hoped to have fathomed her feelings for him more accurately, and he would there and then have made another attempt, but at that moment the captain came up.

"Your little charge seems to be thriving well, Mrs. Vavasour," said Captain Judson, as he cooed to the child and patted its cheek with his finger.

"Does he not, captain?" she answered. "And don't you think he is a sweetly pretty boy?"

"Very pretty, very pretty, indeed; poor little chap."

"I cannot get the doctor to think so," she remarked, with a sly glance at him.

"You do me a wrong, Mrs. Vavasour," Dr. Shadwell returned, quickly. "I do think he is pretty, although my interest in children never reaches enthusiasm-point. Possibly if I had some of my own I should be different."

"I warrant me you would," exclaimed Captain Judson, heartily. "I've got three, God love them. They are the treasures of my life."

"I daresay they are," the doctor observed, cynically. "But if they were not your own you might not appreciate them so much."

"I don't know. Children are children whosoever they are," the captain said, with sailor-like bluntness. "I should have no objection to take that mite if his poor mother should leave him. He has been well christened with salt water, and I would make a sailor of him."

"If his mother should leave him, I intend to be a mother to him," Mrs. Vavasour remarked, with great decision.

"Bravo," cried the captain.

The doctor made no remark. He seemed annoyed, and threw the stump of his cigar into the sea in a sort of irritable manner. He turned quickly to the lady, and raising his hat, said,

"Excuse my going away, I have a patient to visit in the steerage."

Mrs. Vavasour somehow experienced relief when he had gone. When he was near her he seemed to influence her strangely, but as soon as ever he left she always felt as if she could easily bring herself to positively dislike him. And yet she was perfectly conscious that this man was doing all he could to make his influence over her permanent, and there were times when this knowledge gave her pleasure, and others when it gave her pain. She had often asked herself of late if she was learning to love him, but she had not been able to give anything like a satisfactory answer to the question. He was not an ordinary, not a commonplace man; and if such a paradox can be understood, he attracted even while he repelled. It is a singular fact that he seemed to possess the power of drawing women to him, and yet behind his back few women ever spoke well of him. Mrs. Vavasour had tried to study him, but was compelled to admit to herself that she had not succeeded in learning much. It was always suggested to her, as she searched his dark face, that something sinister lay behind it, and that he had acquired the art of being able to conceal his true thoughts. That dreamy, languid expression in his eyes reminded her of the drowsy tiger. It only veiled the fierce, savage nature that was latent there, and ready to spring into destructive force should occasion arouse it.

These thoughts had troubled her, and more so when it seemed to her that she was doing him a wrong and an injustice. To her he had always been most kind and gracious, as he was in fact to everyone. And though at times he displayed irritability, that was a very human weakness. She wondered often, how it was that he so frequently occupied her thoughts, and she tried to explain it to herself by saying that no woman could allow a man to pay her even the most platonic attentions and not think of him occasionally. This was not, perhaps, a very satisfactory solution, but it satisfied her to some extent, for she was convinced that up to this time she bore no other feeling for him but the most ordinary friendship, such as a young woman might, with the strictest propriety, entertain for a gentlemanly man who had been of considerable assistance to her.

As she sat now nursing the baby, and gazing thoughtfully out to

the far-off horizon where the sea was like the rim of a silver shield, she found herself trying to analyse all he had said to her, and she wondered whether he was correct in his opinion with reference to the baby's mother. If so, then there must be some peculiarly subtle reason for the woman's behaviour. If she were really conscious she must be aware that her baby was saved and that she was amongst friendly strangers. What, then, was the potent force that could induce her to smother down the maternal instincts and preserve a death-like silence, when for her child's sake she ought to tell something of her history?

As Mrs. Vavasour dwelt upon the subject her powers of reasoning were not capable of suggesting any motive for a proceeding so utterly strange, and so she concluded that Dr. Shadwell was very much mistaken, and that the unfortunate woman was drifting into eternal silence, and was in that comatose state that so frequently precedes dissolution of the body.

Towards the close of that day Mrs. Vavasour found herself sitting by the bunk in which the woman lay, and gazing intently at the marble face, trying to think of some of the secrets that dazed brain held.

The baby, covered with an Indian netting, was fast asleep in the upper bunk, and save for the creaking of the masts, as the vessel rose and fell, everything was very quiet. The widow was unusually pensive, and thoughts of her dead husband mingled with thoughts of this woman and the sleeping child.

The woman, covered with the thinnest of sheets, was so still and so white and corpse-looking that she might easily have been taken for one dead. Her hand, thin and almost transparent, with the blue veins standing out with startling clearness, lay on the coverlid; and, moved by a sentiment of tenderness and pity, Mrs. Vavasour took this hand between her own and caressed it, yearning intensely to know something of the mystery of the poor creature's life.

Presently the woman lifted her heavy eyelids, and fixed her sunken eyes on the widow's face. Mrs. Vavasour observed this, and, bending over her, whispered,

"Are you better now? Can you speak? Do tell me something about yourself."

The woman's body seemed to quiver, as though something had surged through it. She closed her fingers about those of the kindly hands that held hers, and her lips moved as if forming words. Mrs. Vavasour bent her ear down to catch anything that might be said, and she heard this strange question,

"Am I alive?"

The widow's mystery had spoken at last; but the words indicated little, save it was that the brain was still stunned. Still bending over her, still holding her hand, Mrs. Vavasour answered with all that marvellous tenderness that a woman knows how to put into her voice on such an occasion.

"Yes, poor thing; and you are with one who will be a true friend to you."

Again the woman was shaken as by a convulsion, and there broke from her thin lips now an audible sob, while the white eyelids, falling down, quivered with nervous emotion.

It was as if the spell of horror that had so long bound her was dissolved at last, and a ray of light was breaking in on the darkness. For who can doubt, judging from the face as it first showed itself over the bulwarks of the wreck to Mr. Stobo, that the brain had been horror-bound. When the mate first saw that face it was appalling in its look of stony horror and speechless fear, and the brain must have been shocked into a numbness from which the marvel was that it could thaw at all. But now there were unmistakable indications of returning sensibility. Those sobs spoke too surely of feeling and bitter memory, though memory could only have been hazy as yet, for the poor thing murmured in whispered accents,

"How the sea roars in my ears. O God, pity me!"

Mrs. Vavasour put her face close to that of the unhappy creature, and spoke such words of comfort and consolation as only a woman could speak at such a moment. It was apparent that the invalid heard and understood what was said, and drew comfort and strength from the words. Perhaps she felt she had found shelter and hope at last.

Mrs. Vavasour waited for some time, then in low and measured tones she said,

"Tell me, what is your name?"

There was no answer, only sobs. The widow still held the wasted hand, and with her other hand she smoothed back the dark hair from the invalid's forehead, and tried to soothe her with caressing touches. After a long pause, as no answer to her question was forthcoming, she ventured to speak again, and this time she felt, as a woman, her question must find the other woman's heart, unless the brain was too dazed to comprehend.

"You have a baby boy," she said, "would you like to see him?"

There was magic in the words, for the invalid's eyes flashed open, as it were, and clasping her thin hands together she exclaimed in a very weak, trembling voice, that scarcely rose above a whisper,

"Ah, my boy, my boy; God has taken him!"

"No, your boy lives," answered Mrs. Vavasour, and rising from the camp-stool on which she sat, she lifted the child out of the bunk, and placed him on his mother's breast.

Instantly the woman uttered a cry, and throwing her arms round the infant she hugged him frantically, so that he awoke and screamed with fright. Mrs. Vavasour toyed with his curls and spoke to him, and he soon became consoled, and nestling his face to his mother's breast he sobbed himself to sleep once more. A few minutes before this a figure had half entered the cabin, but drew back suddenly at the child's cry, and stood outside, listening.

The figure was that of Dr. Shadwell.

Mrs. Vavasour had not noticed him, she was too much absorbed in the pathetic little drama in which she was playing a part.

The effort and the excitement had exhausted the mother, so that it was some time before she was enabled to speak again, and then the faltering accents and the fluttering breath told too certainly that the flame of life was flickering to its extinction.

"My senses are all confused," she said, "but things come to me dimly. I hold my child to my breast, do I not?"

"Yes."

There was a pause, marked by the dying woman's sobs. Then,

"I cannot talk," she said, "for I am exhausted; but if you could find a bag it would tell you all."

Mrs. Vavasour took down from the hook, where it had hung ever since the woman had been brought on board, the sponge bag which the poor creature had worn under her clothes.

"Is this it?" she asked, gently, as she held it before the woman's eyes.

The thin hand clutched it, as if the woman wanted to assure herself that she was not dreaming. Then, excitedly, she exclaimed,

"Yes, yes, I am sure it is. Keep it, treasure it, hold it sacred as you value your immortal soul. A dying mother charges you to do this. When this boy is old enough give him the contents of the bag, and let him avenge his mother's wrongs."

She made an effort to say something more but her voice failed her, and she beat the air with her hands, as if struggling for breath.

Mrs. Vavasour was frightened. She snatched up the child and laid him in the upper bunk, and then rushed out to search for the doctor. She had not to search far, for she ran up against him, as he stood in the little passage. She was too excited to be struck with the extraordinary circumstance of his being there. The passage was in shadow, for very little light from the swinging lamp in the saloon reached it. She did not recognise him till he spoke. He simply pronounced her name. "Oh doctor, quick, quick," she cried in agitation, "I think the poor woman is dying!"

Dr. Shadwell entered the cabin. Had she noticed his face she might have been astonished at its paleness. He showed no trepidation, however, but seating himself coolly on the camp-stool he put his fingers on the woman's wrist; then bent his head and placed his ear over her heart. He rose up in a few moments, drew Mrs. Vavasour's arm through his, and said,

"Come, let me take you on deck, and I will send the stewardess here."

Mrs. Vavasour was sobbing. She allowed him to lead her away. She knew what he meant.

The woman was dead.

CHAPTER IV

DR. SHADWELL TRIES TO MAKE LOVE.

THE air was hot and still on the ocean's face, which was filled with ghostly phosphorescent splendour. There was an utter sense of loneliness and silence on the great deep; and yet not quite a silence, for under the counter of the *Pearl*, as she rose to the lazy swell and dropped down again, was that strange musical gurgle which once heard is never forgotten, for it lingers with one like a dream echo.

Daylight had long ago faded out, and darkness came. A darkness that was not a darkness, but a solemn duskiness that seemed all but unreal, for the great tropical moon hung in the tropical sky, and over the breathing sea was a great pathway of silver sheen that narrowed until it touched the far-off horizon. All round the vessel were myriads of flashing stars that seemed to come up from the depths, and burst into evanescent flame. The *Pearl* was motionless, save now and then when the sea's bosom rose like some heavily breathing monster. Then her sails flapped out like the struggling wings of a tired bird, and fell back again with a rattle, and all would be still until the next heave came. Far above in the dark blue vault the stars shone with a radiance that only a tropical sky can show, and they were mirrored again in the oily sea, until the ship seemed to float in space between two heavens.

There is something so mysterious, so solemn, so ghostly in a night such as this on a tropical ocean that the heart that is not touched must be strange indeed. The roar of busy life, as the land knows it, is not here, but a weird hush, as if the world were dead and the shroud of eternal night enveloped it. If you think at all of the great cities, with their restless fever of human passions, it is as of something you have known in a former existence; for out here, in

the vast wilderness of the mysterious ocean, and at such an hour, one lives a dream life.

The *Pearl* was making no headway, but drifting slowly with the silent under-currents, and behind her and around her was, so to speak, a nebulous of pallid gleams, as her great bulk moved imperceptibly along, while against her bows the water sometimes heaved up with a sort of weary sigh, and then scattered in spray of spectral silver. On the top of the deckhouse, in the waist of the ship, was something more mysterious even than the mystery of sea or sky,—a something that the ghostly moonbeams brought into startling relief,—a something that was cold and still, and yet spoke in eloquent muteness; for beneath the Union Jack the body of the unknown woman lay in the dreamless sleep of death.

The story of her life was done so far as she was concerned; but it was yet to be woven with that of Mrs. Vavasour, who in the shadow thrown by the awning that was still spread over the poop—for the heat below drove many of the people to sleep up here—was reclining in a so-called couch-chair, with a gauzy shawl thrown over her. She was not sleeping but dreaming waking dreams, and gazing out and along on that shining track under the moon as though she was trying to read her future.

Four bells, ten o'clock, had struck some time ago, and the watch on deck, save those who had the "look-out," were scattered about the deck asleep, as sailors do sleep with one eye open.

Presently a voice spoke to Mrs. Vavasour, spoke in low tones, as in keeping with the hour and the silence around; and it queried,

"Are you sleeping, Mrs. Vavasour?"

She was startled from her reverie, and turning quickly, as she recognised the voice, she answered,

"No."

"I am so glad," said Dr. Shadwell. "May I sit down beside you?"

Before she could answer his question he had opened a camp-stool he had in his hand, and placed himself close to her chair.

Somehow she was not sorry he had come, for a sense of loneliness had impressed her, and it was pleasant to have company.

"Why are you glad I am not asleep?" she asked.

"Because I wish to talk to you. It's a glorious night, isn't it?" he added, after a pause.

"Yes," she answered, pensively.

"You speak in saddened tones," he remarked, as though you were mourning. "If I could will your life as I would wish no sadness should ever enter into it; but none among us can escape the sorrows that are blended with the joys in the cup of existence. Sooner or later the bitter drops of the chalice must touch all human lips."

His words smote the fount of her tears, and she wept. Perhaps he wished this; and had taken advantage of her mood to touch her sensibility, knowing that a woman is never so vulnerable as when a poetical spirit of melancholy moves her to tears. If this *was* his theory he had practical proof of its accuracy, for her white hand was resting on the arm of the chair, and he placed his own upon it very gently, and she allowed it to remain there. Then when he had waited a little he recited in melodious tones—

"The air is faint with scent of sea,
The sky is of so dark a blue;
The dull gold of the stars breaks through
Like watching worlds that beam on thee."

He saw the gleam of her eyes as she turned upon him in surprise, and remarked,

"I did not know before, doctor, that you were poetical."

"I dare say not," he answered. "I am many more things also that as yet you know nothing about," he added, with a little laugh. "You know Carlyle says somewhere that every life is a poem, with beginning, middle and end, with perplexities and solutions, with warfare against fate, with its elegy and battle-singing, and everywhere the tragic elements of pity and fear."

"You talk strangely to-night," she said, her surprise growing.

"Yes. I *feel* strangely also. This deeply poetical night has affected me. I have been trying to sleep, and cannot. And an irresistible something, a power I know not what, has driven me to you."

"To me! Why to me?"

"Because the beat of your heart is echoed in mine."

She withdrew her hand from his now, and said, in a tone that left him in doubt whether she was angry or not,

"I wish you wouldn't speak in riddles, doctor. I am not good at guessing them, and therefore I do not like them."

"Do I speak in riddles?" he asked. "If I do they are riddles that especially appeal to your womanly instincts, and need but little guessing."

She felt uneasy, and could she have done so without being positively rude she would have risen and gone away. As it was she turned from him, and her face burned redly, but under the awning it was too dark for him to notice that.

"This monotonous calm is dreadful," she remarked, referring to the still sea and stagnant air. "Do you think there is any possibility of a change soon?" She said this for the sake of saying something that would turn the conversation. But she was conscious that it was rather a clumsy effort, and she felt annoyed with herself.

"I am filled with a theme," he said, with a laugh, "of infinitely more interest to us both than that of the weather."

"And what may that be?" she asked, with palpitating heart.

He bent forward until his face was very close to hers, and whispered in a prolonged cadence the one word—

"LOVE!"

She started from him.

"You have no right to speak like that, doctor," she said, faintly.

"And wherefore not? Is the theme unpleasant to you? If it is, then you are not a woman."

She trembled with excitement that she tried hard to suppress. She wanted to be angry with him, and yet felt somehow as if she could not. His audacity ought to be checked; she knew that perfectly well, but she also knew that she was powerless to check it. He had, so to speak, thrown a silken net over her, and all conscious of her struggles to free herself, he was viewing them with pleasure and amusement.

"Dr. Shadwell, I command you not to speak to me on such a subject now," she returned, with a lamentable attempt to be stern.

"And why not now?" he asked, in a tone of well-feigned surprise. "The time, the opportunity, and the surroundings are singularly fitting. Love is ever associated with a poetical sentiment, and have we not poetry all around us? Look at those myriads of

golden stars; behold the silvered bosom of the infinite deep; the winds sleep, and the ineffable beauty of a tropical night is over us. If this is not the hour for love-making, pray tell me when it is?"

She was not displeased with his words, but she still had that desire to leave him, and yet lacked the moral courage to rise and go.

"Why should you talk to me of love?" she asked, confusedly, and scarcely knowing what she said.

"Why should I?" he cried. "Why do men talk to women of love? Am I not a man and are you not a woman? Can there be any other reason that I so talk if it be not that I love you?"

"O Dr. Shadwell, you must not say that," she murmured, as her heart fluttered like a frightened bird's.

"Must not!" he echoed.

"No."

"And why must not? Is it a crime for me to love you?"

"Oh, no, no," she answered, in great distress; "I do not mean that. But you take me so much by surprise. We have known each other for such a short time, and it is so recently that my poor husband died. I have no right to listen to you. It seems to me to be an outrage upon the memory of the man who gave me his name."

"Love that wants long to grow is but a cold thing," he remarked, with a sneer. "I have known you long enough to feel that the world holds never another woman that can be to me what you are."

"Doctor ——."

"Nay, be not surprised, for you must have known this before I told you."

"How could I possibly know it?" she asked, with some sharpness in her tone.

"How does a woman know when a man admires her? A woman has a special faculty for divining it, and that faculty is incapable of being described."

"If you have admired me you paid me a compliment," she retorted, "a compliment not, perhaps, altogether deserved."

"Pardon me for saying so, but that is hardly correct," he answered. "You are deserving of admiration even from your enemies."

"Really, doctor, how extravagant you are in your flattery!" she returned, petulantly.

"Why are you so cross?" he asked.

"I am not cross, but I don't like flattery."

"Do you think that I flatter you when I tell you that I love you, Mrs. Vavasour?"

"I don't know. Certainly you have no business to tell me that."

"No business to tell you," he said, in surprise, and then in rather a sneering way, asked, "Has no man any business to tell a woman he loves her? Why, I'll even go further than I have done, and say that I have believed that you were not indifferent to me."

"You have inspired me with friendship," she said, quickly, "but not with love."

"Pshaw," he exclaimed, "friendship indeed! Love implies difference of sex; friendship implies, or supposes, its absence. Love is a vital passion, friendship an intellectual one. Friendship, therefore, is little suited to the unintellectual and instinctive faculties of woman."

She turned with an angry gesture towards him, and said, in tones of sharpness that rather startled him, "You are insulting, sir; insulting to me as a woman, and to my sex in general. If women have no intellectual faculties, it is a pity indeed that such a clever man as yourself should waste your valuable time in their company."

"Nay, pardon me," he cried, in alarm. "I did not mean to offend you."

"Possibly not," she said, sarcastically, as she rose from her seat, "but you have offended me, and I have the pleasure to wish you good-night."

She bowed stiffly to him, swept past, and descended to her cabin.

He made no attempt to stop her. He knew too much of human nature not to know that it was dangerous to cross a woman in the height of her anger, especially when that anger arose from wounded *amour propre*. He pulled forth his cigar-case, lit a cigar, and leaning against one of the awning stanchions, he gazed down into

the dark depths of the water, and musing on what had passed, he mentally exclaimed,

“You do not like me, Mrs. Vavasour; but nevertheless you shall be my wife. Just as surely as that moon is in the heavens. You may try to fight me, but I’ll break your pride and your heart, rather than let you escape.”

CHAPTER V

“SAFE BIND, SAFE FIND.”

THE moon dropped down in the sea, the stars paled, and the darkness of night gave place to a pearly light. The sea was still unruffled even by a “cat’s-paw.” The air was fiery with heat. Then on the eastern horizon the sky became beryl, imperceptibly changing to scarlet that deepened and deepened into blood red, and high above the red was flaming gold, slashed with orange and violet, and the sea catching these hues glowed like a vast plain of mosaic, set with precious jewels. Some fleecy clouds that floated in the east burned with amber flame mingled with jets of crimson. And then following all this regal pomp and glory came the kingly sun, sending as heralds in advance of him long jasper beams that told even in the distant west, where the fringe of night’s mantle still lay, that his majesty approached. Once more a tropical day had dawned over that heat-stricken sea, and the *Pearl* still lay

“Like a painted ship upon a painted ocean.”

In the face of all this shimmering light and glory of colour that out-rivalled the humming-bird’s hues, it seemed like a mockery that that thing that was once a woman should be lying in marble coldness, with England’s flag for her winding-sheet. But it was not to lie there long. Even before the under rim of the sun had left the horizon, there came like a shudder through the glittering air the solemn toll of the ship’s bell. Then four sailors mounted to the deckhouse, and lifting the grating on which the “thing” lay, carried it down to the open gangway on the lee side, where it was placed with all that golden light falling upon it.

In slow and deeply-impressive tones, aspen-like with emotion,

Captain Judson read the sweetly-sad "Service for the burial of the dead at sea."

The poor stranger who had been rescued from the fury of the ocean only to find her grave in it at last was not without mourners, and sincere ones, too. Nearly all the passengers had assembled on deck, and not a few of the ladies wept genuine tears of sorrow.

There was something ineffably touching in the tolling bell and the stilled figure of the dead woman—a something that found out even the emotional springs of bronzed sailors, who, facing death boldly when he howled at them in roaring winds and stormy seas, turned away now with tears on their tanned faces, for death in its most solemn and poetical aspect was amongst them. It was a positive relief to the overstrained feelings of many of those gathered around when, simultaneously with the muffled boom of the bell, came the words from the captain's trembling lips, "Commit her body to the deep." Then from off the tilted grating slipped the swathed rigid figure into the greedy sea, sending up a cascade of golden drops, and sinking, sinking, down, down into the secret depths of that unfathomable deep; and who shall say that the patient sorrow of the unknown woman had not found issue in everlasting peace?

Mrs. Vavasour had been a witness of this impressive scene, and no one was moved by sincerer grief than she.

As she turned away when the splash of the body in the water told that the great grave had received another tenant, she was surprised to come face to face with Dr. Shadwell, who had been standing immediately behind her. She was annoyed, for it seemed as if this man haunted her now.

Bowing, he said,

"You seem overcome, Mrs. Vavasour. Will you allow me to lead you below?"

"No, thank you," she answered, coldly, and feeling as if even the respect she had for him was dying away. She passed on, and he stood looking after her with a dark frown mantling his swarthy face. The frown gave place to a cynical sneer as he muttered,

"So you treat me with scorn, do you? Well, I can wait; and the man who waits wins."

Mrs. Vavasour descended to her cabin, where she distracted her

thoughts by washing and dressing the baby, for whom a strong motherly love was springing up in her heart now that he was an orphan. She rejoiced that it had fallen to her lot to be able to claim to have the care of this child. She was still young, and yet she had already tasted the bitter drops of sorrow and disappointed hopes in the deaths of her own child and her husband. Her short married life had been a truly happy one, for her husband was a devoted and good man. Therefore her double bereavement came with the heavier shock, and she had experienced that awful void and desolation which one feels when death has severed us from our beloved ones. It was true, perhaps, that this void could never adequately be filled up, but the orphan boy would go a long way towards doing it. He would afford her occupation, and keep her from sinking into herself. A woman wants something, must have something, whereon to bestow the love that is for ever crying out in her nature. And in one so constituted as Mrs. Vavasour was—so youthful, so full of energy, so sympathetic, only something human could satisfy her.

The child—"the ocean waif"—had come at the right time. Doctor Shadwell had been taking a hold upon her affections, but as evidence of how slight that hold was she had already broken it off, though it is very likely if the sea had not given her this child, her affection for the doctor would have grown instead of dying out. As she finished the child's toilet, and then sat him up in his bunk that she might admire him, for he had grown fat and chubby, and looked very bonnie in the pretty clothes that the deft fingers of the ladies had made for him, she kissed the fair forehead, round which in tiny ringlets the dark hair flowed, and as the tears started to her eyes, she murmured, "Dear little fellow, your poor mother is sinking down to the bottom of the great sea, but never, while there is life in my body, shall you want for a mother's love, if I can help it. I wonder, darling, what your name is. I wish you could tell me."

It is a singular thing, and yet not singular, after all, seeing how her thoughts and attention had been recently absorbed, that up to this moment she had not thought about the child's name. Now she wondered how it was that she did not seek to learn it during that brief interval when the dying mother showed that she was

sensible to the world around her. Those lips, however, were now sealed with the seal of eternal silence, and the child was left as a nameless ocean waif. But as was only natural Mrs. Vavasour remembered the bag which she had taken from the mother's person, and which that mother alluded to as being able to disclose her secrets. Had not the hour now come when she might seek to learn what the contents of the bag had to tell her? She was glad, therefore, when attracted by the crowing and laughter of the little fellow a lady passenger came in and asked Mrs. Vavasour to allow her to take the child on deck. She wanted to be alone and quiet for awhile, and this was a good opportunity; and if, as she guessed, the bag contained some written statement, she would be able to peruse it without interruption. When the lady had gone with the boy, Mrs. Vavasour closed the cabin door and then took the bag down from its hook where it hung against the bulkhead. It was simply an ordinary sponge-bag, made of waterproof material, and such a one was to be found amongst the effects of nearly every passenger on board of a ship.

It was not difficult to guess, arguing from all the facts of the case, that the unhappy mother had put her letters and papers, or whatever they were, into this bag as the only waterproof receptacle at hand calculated to preserve them, for a time at least, from the effects of the salt water.

As Mrs. Vavasour handled the bag now she was astonished—more than that, amazed—to observe that it was collapsed as if empty, whereas when she last had it in her hand it was bulky, and a child's fingers passing over it would have distinguished that its contents, or a portion at least, were papers. Her heart came into her mouth with a nameless fear. What did this mean? Could she possibly have been mistaken? Was the bag not empty when she took it from the woman's body? She dwelt only for a moment on this idea, and then dismissed it as preposterous. The fact that it was full *then* was apparent as that it was empty *now*.

With trembling fingers she undid the tape that was twisted round the mouth of the bag, and revealed to herself too surely that there was nothing but emptiness.

She sank down upon a stool quite overcome, and a sense of undefinable horror crept over her.

The dying woman's words rang in her ears. She heard them distinctly, as when they were spoken.

"If you could find a bag it would tell you all," she had said.

Could it be possible that the woman was then labouring under a delusion? that she was the victim of some phantasmagoria, the result of a disordered brain, that had been subjected to shocks of horror?

It might almost have seemed so, if Mrs. Vavasour had not had the evidence of her sense of touch to attest to the unmistakable bulkiness of the bag. What caused that bulkiness? At that moment it did not much matter about trying to determine what it was. The bulkiness had given place to a void. That was a painfully evident truth.

The contents of the bag had gone. Where had they gone to?

Human fingers must have removed them. Whose fingers were they?

These were the thoughts that wove themselves into Mrs. Vavasour's brain, as she sat staring blankly at the bulkhead as if she were dazed.

Then again, she heard the dying woman's voice as it uttered those solemn words when she learnt that the bag was safe.

"Keep it, treasure it, hold it sacred as you value your immortal soul. A dying mother charges you to do this. When this boy is old enough, give him the contents of the bag, and let him avenge his mother's wrongs."

She was appalled as she recalled these words. What could they have meant if they did not mean that in the bag was to be found some written record that would have told the speaker's story.

"Let him avenge his mother's wrongs."

Did not this remark, beyond all question of cavil, sound a keynote to the woman's history? Why should she, standing as she was then, on the narrow strand that parts the known from the unknown, solemnly charge her son with the duty of avenging her wrongs?

It is hardly of consequence at this stage that the precise meaning of the word "avenge," as here used, should be determined. It is an elastic word at all times, and has an ugly sound. We know that frequently when uttered under southern skies it means

the use of the gleaming dagger, the swift-piercing bullet, or the subtle potency of poison.

In this instance it was surely not to be interpreted in any such way. It is a word always associated with human wickedness and human wrong. The woman spoke of "wrongs," and implied therefore that she was the victim of somebody's wickedness; and in wishing her son to avenge her, she meant, no doubt, that her enemies who had wronged her might be punished in due course by the law of man.

Now, Mrs. Vavasour sat there sensible of the fact, that unwittingly and unconsciously, she had broken her trust, and betrayed the dying woman's solemn charge, and yet that woman had not been in her sea grave an hour yet.

Mrs. Vavasour was distracted, and heaped upon herself opprobrious epithets for having been so stupidly careless as to have neglected locking the bag up, so that she might have realised the adage, "Safe bind, safe find." It was too late now. Regrets bitter and painful alone were hers; and it seemed likely that the mystery of the mother and child would never be solved. For the woman was silent enough in her ocean grave, and her boy was too young to know aught of his mother's history. If Mrs. Vavasour had been a less sensitive woman than she was she could hardly have done other than she did now, namely, weep hysterically with a sense of great sorrow and despair. It is true, the dead waif and the living one were utter strangers to her; but the sea and fate had bound a link between her and the boy, and she felt and knew instinctively that the moulding of that boy's destiny was in her hands. But by a careless act, she had at the very onset lost the clue to the boy's identity.

The contents of the bag had been stolen, that seemed to her clear; and whoever the thief was, he must have been cunning and artful to have abstracted the contents and left the bag behind, for it was well known to most of the passengers that the bag was there, but no living soul on board had any idea of what it contained. To have taken the bag would have been an open theft, but by leaving it behind it placed Mrs. Vavasour in the difficult position of proving what was in the bag, if she wished to establish that whatever it contained had been abstracted. As it was

now, people would look upon the robbery as one so little likely to have been committed, inasmuch as it would most naturally appear that no one on board had the remotest interest in taking the papers away, if they were papers, and there was no proof that they were. It is true, Mrs. Vavasour could point to the fact that the dying woman herself had referred to the bag, and charged her to carefully guard it; but again, how was she going to substantiate her statement? Even if people believed that the woman did refer to it in the manner named, was it not highly probable that it would be said she was labouring under a delusion, or that Mrs. Vavasour herself had been mistaken?

Mrs. Vavasour, even in her great distress, viewed the whole circumstance in the above light, for she was much given to reasoning things out, and she was far too shrewd to overlook what certainly must have occurred to a far less intelligent person than herself.

Of course she very naturally tried to arrive at something like a justifiable suspicion as to who the guilty party might be, and this suspicion was led by instinct to fix upon Dr. Shadwell, and yet it seemed to her absurd to suppose that he could have done it.

Why should he have done it? What interest had he in doing it? Nothing like a satisfactory answer could she find to these questions; but still with womanly obstinacy she clung to the suspicion. And yet as against this was the fact that the doctor was to all appearances a gentleman and a man of honour; holding an important position in that little floating community, and looked up to and respected by all. Was it likely, then, that such a man would have stooped so low, and so seriously have jeopardised his honour?

This view did not escape her reasoning faculty; but still she clung to the suspicion. She shrank from doing a wrong to anyone, even in thought, and yet she could not shake the suspicion off, do what she would.

How was she to act? That seemed to her most difficult to determine. But this thought came into her brain, "I am a woman, and have a woman's wit: I will watch and wait."

It was a very wise resolve, when all the circumstances are considered, but it seemed to give her a chance, vague enough at

present it was true, but still a chance that time would bring her revenge, and enable her to solve the mystery; whereas, on the other hand, if she had noised the affair about, the guilty person would probably have utterly destroyed everything that might be used as proof against him.

To use a metaphor, guilt usually walks in wool silently; detection must follow in the same way.

Mrs. Varasour determined that the bag should remain in her possession, and she would stow it away at the very bottom of her trunk and keep the trunk locked. But it suddenly occurred to her that as it was not unusual to put one's name on a bag of this kind when going to sea, she got up and examined the bag carefully, but could find no name, though the examination led her to discover at the bottom of the bag the half of a Bank of England note for £100, and it was signed on the back, in a cramped hand, *Caleb Skeats*.

No wonder that she grew excited as she made this discovery. The stealer of the contents had evidently overlooked this, and she could not help believing that it was a most important clue, and might lead to important results. The name on the back was an extraordinary one, not often met with, and the flimsy bit of paper represented a considerable sum of money. Therefore, unless the other half of the note was utterly destroyed, or irretrievably lost, the holder of it might possibly be discovered.

"This is a weapon," Mrs. Varasour muttered, "and a woman ought to know how to use it."

Then she placed the half note and the bag in a small writing desk, locked the desk, put the desk at the bottom of her trunk, and locked her trunk; and the adage did occur to her then of "Safe bind, safe find."

CHAPTER VI.

FROM THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

FOR many days the *Pearl* continued to roll upon the glittering, equatorial swell, with the blinding, blazing sun standing at noon right overhead, and pouring its scorching rays "right up and down," until the pitch bubbled up out of the ship's seams, and the metal work about her rails that was exposed to the full power of the sun would have blistered the fingers that touched it. Shoals of ravenous sharks hung about the vessel, and made the sea horrible with the flash of their black, wet fins. And all this time the idle sails hung limp and motionless against the masts.

At length the burning equator was crossed. The *Pearl* drifted over it somehow. Then came tremendous tropical squalls, with rain that lashed the ocean into hissing white froth, and lightning that blazed out in blinding sheets from every quarter of the black heavens at one time. The careful skipper, however, was always on the look-out for these squalls, and keeping his good ship snug, he took advantage of the wind to make headway, and leave that horrible dead world of calms behind, until at last the *Pearl* drew into the influence of the south-east trades. Then with joyful shanties the crew trimmed the yards, got all possible sail upon the ship, and the *Pearl* went bowling merrily down to the Cape.

It can well be imagined the intense relief everyone experienced at this welcome change from the dreadful stagnation of the equator. To hear the piping of the wind and roaring of the waves once more was welcome music indeed, for their song seemed to be "Home, sweet home."

During the hot weather, and notwithstanding her residence in India, Mrs. Vavasour suffered very much. She became a victim to insomnia and loss of appetite, and her friends saw with alarm that

she not only looked very ill, but absolutely was so, and at last she broke down altogether, and had to take to her bed.

Since that memorable night when Dr. Shadwell had sat beside her under the awning on the poop deck she had treated him with studied reserve, never allowing him to make the slightest advances to her. She was therefore very desirous of not falling into a condition when his professional advice might be necessary, and with this view she struggled against the illness that was bearing her down as long as she possibly could.

That some difference existed between her and the doctor was very apparent to all the saloon passengers, and the ladies particularly had freely discussed the subject, and marvelled much what Shadwell had done to fall into disgrace with the "pretty widow." She herself, much to their astonishment and in some cases even disgust, kept her own counsel, and all the artful manœuvres that were resorted to to "draw her out" failed utterly.

Of course the doctor did not escape some quiet chaff on the part of the gentlemen, and he had to stand the fire of such questions as, "What's the matter, doctor, between you and the little widow?" "I say, Shadwell, old fellow, what have you been up to with the widow, eh? She seems to be breaking her heart about you." "It strikes me, doctor, the widow's cut you; isn't that so?"

He stood this sort of thing with perfect good humour, and his answer invariably was a smile or an emphatic "I don't know, I'm sure," until the gentlemen unanimously voted amongst themselves that, "Shadwell is a sly dog; it's not easy to fathom him."

The time came at last when Mrs. Vavasour fell so alarmingly ill that she took to her bed, but even then she showed a painful reluctance to accept the services of the ship's doctor, until, yielding to strong persuasion and the exigencies of circumstances, she sent him a message to say that she would like to see him. But she did not do this until she had solicited the services of the medical gentleman who was a passenger on board. He had, however, been compelled to tell her that, having regard for professional etiquette, he could not possibly attend her when there was a duly qualified man appointed by the ship. She saw the force of this objection at once, and as there was nothing else for it she placed herself in Dr. Shadwell's hands, and he paid her the first professional visit

one night immediately after dinner. She was alone in her cabin, for one of the ladies had kindly undertaken the care of the child, and she felt so very ill and so very weak that, for the first time, a dreadful fear came upon her that she was stricken with some mortal disease. And, strange as it may seem, she felt, as the doctor laid his fingers on her pulse, and she looked up into his dark, handsome face, as if she had been doing him a deadly wrong, and in that moment something like her old regard for him came back.

"I am so *very* glad you have sent for me," he said, with marked sympathy. "You don't know how I have suffered as I have watched the colour fade from your cheeks, and seen you grow daily more feeble; and yet, knowing as I did that you had reared up a barrier between us that until you gave the word I had no right to try and pass, I have been compelled to smother down my sorrow and keep silent."

"Perhaps I have been wrong," she murmured, and her remark brought a triumphant smile to his lips.

Perhaps, he thought to himself. I only say *perhaps*. You are a clever woman, Mrs. Vavasour, and a deep woman, and a shrewd woman, but I am a clever man, and a deeper man, and a shrewder man, and I have conquered you.

"What do you think is wrong with me, doctor?" she asked; "I beg that you will not hesitate to tell me the truth."

"I have told you the truth at all times," he returned, significantly; "but if I should hesitate now, it would be because I wished to spare you anxiety."

"Oh, pray don't deceive me," she cried, pleadingly.

"No, I will not deceive you," he said. "You are on the very verge of brain fever."

His words seemed to cause a stream of icy water to trickle down her spine, and she shuddered.

"Brain fever!" she echoed, in alarm.

"Yes."

"Then you think I shall not get better?" she asked, with a despairing sob.

"I don't think anything of the kind. You have youth on your side, and—and beauty. You are too beautiful to die." As he uttered the last words he bent over the bunk and kissed her forehead.

She looked at him in utter amazement. She wanted to feel burning indignation and anger with him, but she could not. The old spell of his influence was upon her. Moreover, the act had been done so gracefully, so utterly without any appearance of rudeness or offensiveness, that it was a difficult matter for her to view it in a serious light. As if guessing what was passing through her mind, he said,

"You must not be angry with me. I simply paid a man's homage to the beauty of which I spoke, and which dazzled me into forgetting for the moment that I am the medical man and you the patient."

How could she feel angry! And yet she did not wish him to suppose that she had approved of his act, so she said with as much energy as she could summon to her aid,

"You are a bold man, Dr. Shadwell."

"I have always borne that character," he answered, with a smile.

"Do not misinterpret my words," she said. "There is boldness and boldness. There is the boldness of impertinence and the boldness of true courage. Need I say which category I place this exhibition of your boldness in?"

"You are severe," he answered; "and I should hope that you do not really deem me impertinent."

"I must ask you," she said, "to strictly keep to your position of my medical attendant."

"May I not even venture to hope that I am also a friend?"

"No," she exclaimed, with startling sharpness, as that haunting suspicion that had so long troubled her flashed before her again. Then modifying her tone, she added,

"I infinitely prefer that you should be my doctor, and nothing more."

"Very well," he answered, with real or assumed sorrow in his voice. "I will master my feelings and strictly observe your wishes." Then, in a grave and professional manner, he said, "You are seriously ill, Mrs. Vavasour, but not necessarily dangerously so; nor do I think, judging from present appearances, that your illness is likely to assume a critical stage, unless you excite yourself. Against that you must carefully guard. I shall ask you to conform strictly to the treatment I shall prescribe, and I venture to

predict that I shall have the pleasure of pulling you through all right. I will give the stewardess some instructions, and I will make you up some medicine for use during the night. I hope to find you better in the morning. Good-night."

He put out his hand and she shook it. When he had gone she lay and pondered on all he had said, and she found herself once more picking her heart to pieces to try and discover which was the true feeling she bore for this strange man. Her thoughts were in such a tumult that she was heartily glad when the stewardess came in and distracted her.

As the days passed away, Mrs. Vavasour was compelled to confess to herself that the doctor was devoted in his attentions to her, and not only won her admiration for his gentlemanly bearing towards her, but also for the skill he displayed. He seemed to her to be a man of strangely contradictory moods, and she tried to study him. One thing was certain—he could, when occasion required, display polish and breeding of no ordinary kind; and he had the power of hiding under a prosaic exterior the poetical vein he had exhibited on many occasions when talking to her.

At this time it is almost certain that her heart might have warmed towards him if it had not been for that suspicion that sat there. She often tried to pluck it out, fearing that she was cruelly wronging him. But it persistently refused to come. If she succeeded in crushing it for a time it soon grew again strong as ever. Yet it was so hard to associate this man, with his education, his talent, his almost courtly polish, with an act so despicable, so mean, so base, and apparently so motiveless, as the theft of those papers. And often in the silent watches of the night she found a dumb voice within her crying out, "Did he commit the theft?" And mentally she would answer, "Oh, it is so hard for me to believe it, so hard, so hard." Notwithstanding the assiduity and care of the doctor, the patient did not mend as rapidly as he expected. He had averted the fever, but she remained in a low, prostrate condition, from which she would not rally. If he had sought for the cause of this, and discovered it, he would have found it in himself. He was the irritating influence that retarded her recovery.

It is not often that a woman has to struggle with conflicting

feelings such as harassed Mrs. Vavasour on this occasion. Often she found herself warming towards Shadwell, but then would come that suspicion like a menacing spectre, and at the sight of it she grew cold again, and it was the painful thought whether or not she was doing him wrong that kept her low when she ought to be getting strong.

The *Pearl* continued to make good way until she reached the latitude of the Cape, and then she fell in with very stormy weather on the Agulhas Bank and was hove-to for several days.

This bad weather had such an effect upon Mrs. Vavasour that she suffered a serious relapse, and for a time remained in such a critical condition that Dr. Shadwell came to look upon her case as almost hopeless. No doubt his anxiety was expressed in his face, and was there read by the patient, for one night when the ship was rolling violently, and a mad gale was howling like a legion of storm-fiends, she said, with a despairing groan,

"O doctor, don't let me die here! It seems so horrible to be buried at sea. Try and prolong my life until we reach the land. Captain Judson tells me he intends to put into St. Helena for water and provisions, and if I live as long I will go on shore there."

"If science and mortal man can save you, you shall be saved," the doctor answered, firmly and sympathetically.

He was standing close to her bunk, and was grasping the edge to keep himself steady as the ship rolled. She placed one of her wasted hands on his as if she thought that from his touch she would derive more assurance. In an instant he had that hand between his own, and pressed it to his lips, and she gave no sign now that she thought it was a liberty, or that she was offended. Quick as he had ever shown himself to seize opportunities, he was no less quick to seize this, and pressing her hand to his heart he said in a deep, affectionate tone,

"You are my happiness, and a man will fight hard to save his happiness."

She could make no reply, but there and then, and for the first time, she returned his pressure, though it might only have been as a sign that she was grateful. But he interpreted it another way, and whispered, "Devoted love can conquer even a woman's strong prejudice."

She was still silent. She still felt that she could not trust herself to speak. She heard his words; they sank into her brain, and she knew that this man, whose skill she must look to to bring her through the crisis, had confessed his love in unmistakable language, and how could she, an apparently dying woman, be indifferent to that confession, when all the circumstances were taken into consideration?

With a view to giving her more ease and comfort the doctor had a swinging cot arranged for her the following day, and he showed in every conceivable and possible way, that he took more than a professional interest in her. He was unwearying in his attention, and the gossips of the community soon began to whisper amongst themselves that "the doctor and his patient seem to have made up their little quarrel, and are getting very fond of each other."

It is scarcely an exaggeration to say, that to the skill he displayed, and the unremitting attention he bestowed, Mrs. Vavasour owed her life. He watched every change in her condition. He traced with scientific eye the subtle influences that were opposed to his skill, and then he brought that skill to bear, with the result that as the *Pearl* drew near to St. Helena he was enabled to say to his patient one morning,

"Mrs. Vavasour, you are saved. All danger has passed, and you must get well now as soon as possible."

It was wonderful how rapidly she did pick up from that hour, so that when a few days later the *Pearl* sailed into shallow water abreast of Jamestown, St. Helena, and dropped her anchor, the invalid was convalescent and sitting on deck. The very sight of land and of fresh faces was a tonic to her after the long voyage and the suffering she had gone through. The next morning Doctor Shadwell took her ashore in one of the ship's boats, and hiring a carriage drove her out to Longwood to visit Napoleon's house and grave.

When they returned in the evening Mrs. Vavasour felt in no way fatigued, but, on the contrary, was so greatly benefited by the change that she began to realise that her illness had departed from her, and though the after effects still lingered, she would shake them off in time. She had thoroughly enjoyed the day—the more so because Doctor Shadwell was evidently at pains to conceal his feelings, and behaved towards her with studied courtesy and

politeness that amounted to reserve. She was quite conscious that she held him in very much higher esteem now than she did a few weeks ago, but though she searched her heart she could find no love there for him. It was therefore only natural that she should be anxious for him not to speak of love to her. She was under a deep and unrequitable obligation to him; and when she remembered his attention during her illness, his nights of watching and his days of care, she felt that it was not in her woman's nature to be deaf to his entreaties even though she could not return his love. But Doctor Shadwell was playing his own game. He was a clever man, and played as a clever man, and he never once reverted to the subject of his feelings for her.

The next evening as the purple shadows of the gloaming were enfolding the lonely island, the *Pearl* got up her anchors and sailed away into the darkening night, and it was Ho! for England!

The run on shore, and the change from the confined limits of ship life, had had a most beneficial effect on Mrs. Vavasour. She improved rapidly, and her beautiful face began to regain its freshness and brightness. During her illness her protégé had been well cared for and carefully tended by one of the lady passengers. He had grown into a most interesting child, and had become a great favourite with everyone on board.

As the child's name was unknown it became a question what he should be called. Somebody suggested that Stormy Petrel would be a most appropriate name, as he had come on board during a raging storm. The name was adopted, but "Stormy" was soon dropped and "Petrel" clung to him, and Petrel it will now be necessary to call him. His foster-mother was not averse to the name, though it was hardly one she would have chosen herself. Still it was euphonious, and certainly original, and so she adopted it.

The voyage of the *Pearl* was now drawing to a close. She had drifted through the "doldrums" again, crossed the equator a second time, picked up the north-east trades, and made a rapid run across the Atlantic, until at last, to the intense joy and relief of everyone, the white cliffs of dear old England were sighted, and after two days in the Channel the good ship came to an anchor off Gravesend. She bore evidence of the long voyage she had made, and of her fight with stormy seas and fierce gales. Grass had grown on her

bottom, to which barnacles clung in clusters, and her sides in parts had been bleached to a dull grey by the combined effects of sun and sea. Her rigging still wore its chafing gear, and her foretopmast head was in splints, having been sprung during a gale in the Bay of Biscay.

Mrs. Vavasour had decided to go on shore at Gravesend, and had sent a telegram on shore at Deal by a boatman, asking a brother, who resided in London, to come down and meet her.

For some weeks Doctor Shadwell had never once reverted to the subject which he seemed at one time to have at heart. He was attentive and courteous to her, but it was a courtesy rather of an attached friend than that of a lover. Mrs. Vavasour had therefore come to hope that he had decided not to speak again of his love. But herein she had miscalculated the man.

Just before she was ready to step into the boat that was to convey her to the shore, Doctor Shadwell, who seemed purposely to have avoided her up to this moment, came to her and said,

"As we are to part for some little time I cannot let you go from me until I have said something I wish to say. Will you come down to your cabin for a few minutes?"

It was strange but none the less true that these words sounded to her like the knell of her hopes. What were these hopes? One certainly was that Doctor Shadwell would not speak of love to her again. She felt under a deep obligation to him, she knew that she owed him a heavy debt of gratitude. Humanly speaking, he had saved her life. He had snatched her from the very jaws of death, therefore he had a claim upon her which she could not disregard. And yet she was possessed with a firmly-rooted conviction that as a friend she could love, as a husband she would hate him.

With all her powers of subtle argument she would have been at a perfect loss to give anything like a logical reason for this anomalous feeling. But a woman reasons by instinct, not by logic, and in nine cases out of ten her instincts are right.

His request was made with great respect, and there was pleading in his tones, and so with a numbness at her heart she accompanied him down to the saloon.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE "DOCTOR" TRIUMPHED.

WHEN they reached the cabin Doctor Shadwell placed a seat for her, and then leaning against the bunk he stood for a moment looking at her with, as it seemed, admiration, as well he might. She was dressed in mourning, and wore the neatest and most becoming of bonnets, and though her face still bore traces of the severe illness she had passed through she was a picture, not wanting in any detail to make her all but perfection from an artistic point of view. A woman criticising her would probably have been guilty of the verbal barbarism of saying that she looked lovely. A man would more correctly have said that she looked beautiful. And beautiful she did indeed look. Her small figure was a study, her face was a power to fascinate, her *tout ensemble* a something to rivet and attract the attention of even the most casual observer.

At last Doctor Shadwell spoke. His tones were quiet but earnest.

"I have waited patiently and hopefully," he said, "up to this very moment of your departure, for some sign from you that would tell me I had won a place in your affection. But I have looked in vain for that sign. It has come not, and I am conscious of a void in which there is a voice ceaselessly crying out for you to fill it."

"I deserve your reproaches," she said, as he paused, "and yet I implore you to spare me."

"I am not reproaching you," he went on, "I am only telling you my thoughts."

"But your thoughts are reproaches nevertheless," she murmured.

"That I can hardly help. *I am a man*. Do you understand what I mean by that?"

"Yes," she faltered.

"Good," he answered. "We shall perhaps get on, then. I repeat I have waited for some sign, and in so waiting I have seemed justified by all that has passed between us. I have dared to hope that during the passage home some act of mine, some service rendered, might possibly so raise me in your esteem that I should have nothing left to sigh for."

"O doctor!" she cried, looking at him imploringly and speaking with agitation, "O doctor! forgive my apparent want of gratitude, and believe me I am very, very grateful."

"Is gratitude all I have earned?" he remarked, with irony.

She hung her head and twisted her gloved fingers about each other after the manner of a person sorely distressed.

"Gratitude," he repeated, sneeringly. "It's a poor fee for a man hungering as I am hungering for something more."

"What more can I give you?" she stammered, scarcely knowing what she said.

"Much," he answered, and then waited for her to speak again.

"Alas, I know not what you would have me do," she moaned.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Vavasour, if I say that you *do* know. But will you answer me a question?"

"It depends upon what you ask."

"Make no conditions," he said.

"Very well, then, I'll answer you if I can."

"This is my question, then. Does some other man possess your heart?"

She looked up suddenly at him, and there was an anger-flash in her eyes as she exclaimed,

"Doctor Shadwell, you forget yourself. Your question is almost insulting."

"In what way, pray?"

"Need you ask that?"

"Unquestionably."

"I should have thought that an intelligent man like you would have seen that your question implies that I have been guilty of outraging my husband's memory almost before he was cold in his grave."

"You take rather a severe view," he answered. "I did not

imply so much as that. But without doing any outrage to your deceased husband's memory your thoughts might possibly turn to some one who in a former period of your life was an image in your heart."

"I do not understand you," she said, indignantly.

"Then you are obtuse," he replied. "A woman may marry and be devoted to her husband. But that does not necessarily prove that he was her only lover. The husband dies, and then, without in any sense outraging the proprieties, her thoughts may revert to her earlier love. Such cases are by no means uncommon."

"I understand you now," she said.

"I am glad you do," he returned. "Then will you permit me to ask if you represent one of these cases?"

"I do not," she answered, with emphasis. "Why do you ask?"

"Because if you did I should have found excuse for the treatment I have experienced at your hands."

"I know I have been cruel to you," she remarked.

"Yes, you have," he answered, boldly; "very cruel."

She scarcely expected him to say this, and she felt uneasy. But she replied,

"Then it only remains for me to express sincere and deep contrition?"

"Do you *really* think that is all, Mrs. Vavasour?" he asked, with great point.

"What else can I do, doctor?"

"What else! Much. You have spoken of gratitude; now you speak of contrition. The terms are mere hyperbole. You know in what sense I express myself when I say you have been cruel. I have tried to win your heart, and you have repulsed me. I have given you the devotion of a man who worshipped you, but you have turned a deaf ear. I have dreamed that it was not impossible for me to prove myself worthy of winning you."

She rose up and stood before him, and laid her hand upon his arm. She was touched by his manner and his words.

"Doctor, do you think me unkind or harsh," she said. "I am deeply sensible to the great kindness you have shown and the attention you have given me. I will not pretend to be ignorant of how you wish me to answer you. You wish me to become

your wife ; but I would ask you whether you have really thought seriously of what it is you ask. Remember, you have known me but a short time, and you cannot possibly be able to tell yet whether I am likely to suit you or not."

He smiled ironically as he answered,

"Really, Mrs. Vavasour, I did think you would have paid me the compliment of supposing that I am possessed of some discernment. Since you and I first came together six months have passed. During that time I have seen you daily, and I must indeed be a poor fool if I have not been able to read something of your character. Thousands of men have married women without having anything like the knowledge of them that I have of you. You must not forget also that there have been times when you have seemed to encourage my advances. Did you do this, then, simply to trifle with my feelings?"

"No, on my soul, no," she cried, a little excitedly.

"Why, then, do you trifle with me now?"

"Ah, doctor, do not wrong me," she said, pleadingly. "I am not so frivolous nor so senseless as to trifle with any man's feelings, let alone with yours. You have inspired me with too much regard for you for me to be indifferent to your feelings. But I am painfully conscious of my own demerits, my own weaknesses, my own failings, and I would suggest that you seek a better and worthier woman for your wife than I am."

"Will you do me the honour of allowing me to have an opinion as to the sort of woman I would like for a wife?"

"Still you may be mistaken in me," she urged.

"I *may*," he answered, pointedly, "but I am willing to run the risk."

"Then suppose we admit that I am in every way suitable," she said, with despair in her tone, "there is a difficulty you seem to overlook."

"What is that?"

"My foster child."

"No, I have not overlooked that difficulty."

"Then how do you propose to deal with it?"

"I do not recognise it as a difficulty at all, at least not such a one as needs keep you and me from becoming man and wife."

"And yet I have heard you say more than once that you detest children. Is it likely that you would come to have regard for this one?"

"I am not prepared to answer that at the present moment."

"Don't you think," she went on, "don't you think that there would be danger of you growing jealous of this poor child if you considered that he occupied too much of my attention?"

"In that case you could send him away. He is an utter stranger to you, and it would surely be no wrench to part from him."

She looked at him indignantly as she made answer.

"Surely, Doctor Shadwell, you are not now speaking seriously. Not a wrench to part from him! Dear me, how little you can have studied woman's nature! But even if it were not a wrench, so far as affection is concerned, do you suppose that I am so lost to all human feeling as to betray the trust reposed in me by a dying creature, and that creature an unfortunate and ill-used woman. If those are your thoughts, sir, they insult me, and incontestably prove that I am not fitted to be your wife, and you are still less fitted to be my husband."

He was a little taken aback by her vehement manner. He had not expected that she would show so much vigour.

"You judge me too hastily," he said. "I had no intention whatever of asking you to outrage your maternal instincts, nor to break a promise given to the dying. I spoke thoughtlessly, but I did not suppose that you could as yet have become very warmly attached to a child that you know nothing of."

"If I know nothing of him whose fault is that? It is the fault of the villain who stole the documents that would have given me the information I wanted."

"Stole the documents!" he echoed. "What documents?"

She looked at him steadily and in surprise. She expected that if that suspicion that had so long haunted her had been true, he would betray some signs of guilt. But he did nothing of the sort. His dark face only expressed amazement. The loss of the papers she had kept a secret, for she had never seen the slightest chance of recovering them by noising the matter about. The thief, she had been convinced, was no ordinary one, and would therefore never run the risk of being discovered, when by throwing the

documents through the port of his cabin, he could have hidden the secret for ever in the sea. If she had openly expressed her belief in the doctor's guilt, was it likely she would have been believed? But assuming that she had, and the captain had taken upon himself the grave responsibility of searching the doctor's cabin and boxes, and nothing had come of the search, would she not have placed herself in a very unenviable position? The stolen property was not anything that any human being on board had seen, and this fact rendered their recovery the more difficult. She had viewed the whole affair in this light, and so had shrunk from giving publicity to the loss, preferring to wait and cling to the forlorn hope that some strange chance would ultimately place a clue in her hands.

Of course it must be borne in mind that in her reasoning she was always under the impression that Dr. Shadwell, and he alone, was the guilty person. It is true the impression had grown strong and faint by turns, and during her critical illness had almost, if not entirely, died out. Now as she stood before him, watching his face and noting his manner, she was pained beyond words at the bare possibility that she had all this time been doing him a cruel wrong. But if he had not taken the contents of the bag away, who had? She mentally ran her eye over every face on board, but she could not fix on one that would have justified her in suspecting.

"There were some papers of some kind," she said, "in a bag that the woman who was rescued from the wreck had tied round her, when she was brought on board. When she lay dying she told me, and they were the last words she ever spoke, that the contents of the bag would give me her history."

"Did you examine the contents?" he said, quickly.

"No."

"And you say they were stolen?"

"Yes."

"Well, you amaze me," he replied, thoughtfully. "Why did you not tell me this before, so that we might have made some inquiries that would have led to the recovery of the missing documents."

She felt sick and faint. She had been wronging this man, then, all the time. He who had tended her with all the solicitude of a

dear friend during her illness, and to whose skill she owed her life, had been placed under a shadow by her suspicions, which, as it seemed to her now, she never had an atom of foundation for.

"O doctor," she cried, "you don't know how unhappy I am! And though you spurn me from you, I must relieve my mind and speak the truth. My suspicions fell upon you! Hence my silence."

"Upon me!" he exclaimed, looking at her, as though he mis-doubted the evidence of his senses. "Surely, Mrs. Vavasour, you are not serious when you say this?"

"Alas, I am," she said, as she burst into tears, and hid her face with her handkerchief.

It was his moment of triumph, and that he felt it to be so was shown by the smile about his lips. He waited some moments until her little outburst of grief had spent itself. Then he spoke.

"This confession, Mrs. Vavasour, although it pains me deeply, does not alter my feeling for you one iota."

"You are indeed a generous man!" she exclaimed, as she looked at him with tearful eyes.

"I could forgive *you* anything," he answered, as he took her hand, and finding that she did not object, he drew her to him gently, and gradually passed his arm round her waist, and absolutely to her amazement she found herself in his arms, and her face pressed to his breast. She made no attempt to free herself. She was captive, and knew it. She owed the man something. The debt was heavily increased by the suspicion she had entertained, and which now she was persuaded was altogether erroneous. How was she to pay the debt? By giving him herself if he desired it. She was quite aware that she did not love him as a woman should love the man who is to be her husband; but she hoped and believed that love would come to her.

As he pressed her to him, he said,

"Have I not fairly won you?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"And you will be my wife?"

"Yes, if you desire it," was the answer, in almost inaudible tones.

"You are perfectly well aware that I desire it."

"Then your desire shall be gratified. I will be your wife, when and where you will."

"You solemnly promise that?"

"I solemnly promise it."

"Then I shall exact a fulfilment of your promise within two months. Put your arms round my neck. Kiss me, and call me husband."

She did as he wished, and kissing him warmly, murmured,

"Husband."

He returned her embrace, and said,

"Wife, my wife."

A few minutes later he stood on the deck waving his hand to her, as she and the child and her brother were being rowed ashore. Then as he turned away, when the boat was out of sight, there was a cold, cynical smile on his face, and he mentally exclaimed,

"I played to win, and *have* won."

CHAPTER VIII.

ISAAC GRETH WAS A GERMAN.

IT is necessary to enter into some detailed particulars as to the rise and progress of the house of Greth Brothers, of Liverpool. The reader will scarcely need to be told that this firm once ranked amongst the wealthiest of the great Liverpool shipping houses. Their fleet of ships was very large, and their house flag, a silver crescent on a blue ground, was flown in almost every principal trading port in the world. Their ships were known as the "Crescent Liners," and though the firm bore the reputation amongst nautical men of being exceedingly mean and cheese-paring, so that sailors had come to speak of the Crescent Line of ships as "starvation hookers," they did an immense carrying trade, and were looked upon as being more than millionaires.

To go back to the origin of the firm, which is not a little curious, we find ourselves near the end of last century. The precise date is of no consequence. But about that time there came to London from Frankfort-on-the-Main a young man who bore the name of Isaac Greth. There was nothing very remarkable in the appearance of this young man, save perhaps his lank yellow hair and his spectacles. He was plain almost to ugliness. His mouth was large, so was his nose, but his eyes were small and deep-set.

Isaac Greth was a German. He was one of a family of six children—three girls and three boys, he being the eldest. His parents were very humble and very poor, and kept a small sausage shop in something strasse at Frankfort. Isaac had always shown a restless disposition and a profound contempt for the sausage trade, until at length, with a few marks in his pocket, he set off to seek his fortune, and naturally turned his footsteps towards that El Dorado of needy Germans—England.

He got a passage down the Rhine as far as Hamburg on a timber raft, and he got from Hamburg to London as a stowaway on board of a sailing packet, though he had to pay for that passage by a month's imprisonment. However, Isaac did not care much for that. He was in the Modern Babylon, and that was something. He had heard from his earliest days fabulous stories of the wealth of London, and as he stood in the street one morning, when he had "done his month," he resolved there and then that he would have a share of that wealth. How he was going to get the share did not at that precise moment seem very clear. His worldly possessions just then were four marks three pffennings, a very seedy suit of clothes, an equally seedy hat, his spectacles, a gingham umbrella, and a porcelain pipe with a wooden stem. Not a very extensive stock it must be admitted; but Isaac saw a long way through his spectacles, and no doubt saw the time when he would have more, for he was very cheerful, and calculated to a nicety how long his four marks three pffennings would last. This calculation proved to him that even with some extravagance he could live sumptuously for six weeks. Isaac Greth was a German. His stock of English at this time was a little less than the other stock of personal estate which we have catalogued, inasmuch as it consisted of exactly two words, "give me." But lor! what could a German not do with two such words! Isaac had learned them specially as likely to be extremely useful, and so they proved to be. For whatever he wanted to purchase he had only to say "give me," and point to the article, and of course he got it.

They proved rather disastrous to him however, on the first occasion when he set about trying to get his share of London's wealth. He had gone into a merchant's office to ask for some employment. A burly porter, who guarded the entrance like a watchful dragon, was not prepossessed by the seedy clothes, the seedy hat, and the gingham umbrella. And the spectacles decidedly prejudiced him. It was not a very logical prejudice, perhaps, but then one doesn't look for logic in a porter.

"Now then, my man, what do you want?" was the way in which he greeted Isaac. Isaac did not understand what was said, though he made a guess, and with considerable pride got out his "give me," and then proceeded to certain pantomimic motions with his

hands, signifying that he wanted work to do. But the dragon was not good at reading signs, and mistaking the visitor for a beggar, he said,

"Now look yer 'ere, young fellow, you clear out of 'ere pretty smart, will yer?"

Isaac, in his blissful ignorance of the Englisher sprache, smiled benignly on the burly porter, repeated his "give me," and went through another series of pantomimic signs.

"Now, then, are yer a-going?" roared the burly porter.

Thinking, no doubt, what a nice-mannered man this was, Isaac smiled again, and repeated his "give me," but was not able to get as far as the pantomimic signs, as the burly porter kicked him out.

Isaac Greth, as he stood rubbing that part of his anatomy where the impact of the burly porter's number eleven had produced a painful sensation, thought that the ways of the London people were rather strange. But it had been a legend constantly told to him from infancy, that the English were peculiar, so he was not disconcerted, and certainly not disheartened. Isaac Greth, you see, was a German!

That evening he dined magnificently off a halfpenny worth of bread and a penny saveloy, which was the nearest approach that he could find at the time to his own beloved sausages of the Fatherland. He paid twopence for some tobacco, slept in a doorway, and the next morning started to make a fresh attempt to get a portion of London's wealth.

On this occasion he was more fortunate. His good genius led him to Leadenhall Street, where in one of the windows of a large building was an engraving of a ship under full sail. The place was not a shop, so it at once occurred to him that it must be a shipowner's office. Now, if there was one thing more than another that Isaac Greth had longed for it was to have something to do with shipping, so in he went. He found a dragon here also, guarding the doorway, and instinctively Isaac glanced at the dragon's feet. The boot was not quite so large as in the other case, but still capable of producing unpleasant sensations. But what was Isaac's astonishment when, having got out his "give me," he discovered that the dragon was a "gompatriot."

The fortune-hunter's story was soon told, and the result was that Isaac received an appointment in that office to clean windows, sweep the floors, and make himself generally useful.

Ten years later he was a partner in that same office. To relate how he attained to that position would be a history in itself. It can all be summed up in this—Isaac Greth was a German!

It will be said that in the short space of ten years Isaac had done very well. So he had; but he wanted to do better in the succeeding ten years.

It happened that just at this time one of the shipping papers announced the sale of a wreck. It was that of a barque, called strangely enough *Good Luck*. She was on her first voyage, and was returning to Liverpool from some East Indian port laden with linseed, and having completed the voyage safely, as far as the mouth of the Mersey, she was there driven on shore near New Brighton during a tremendous gale and thick fog, so that her name was a misnomer as far as her owners were concerned. It was destined, however, that she should prove truly good luck to Isaac Greth. The ship and her cargo were so much damaged that her owners decided it would pay them better to sell her by public auction, just as she lay, battered and stranded on the New Brighton beach. So advertisements were issued to that effect. Isaac saw the advertisements, and heard from a private source that the vessel and cargo could be purchased very cheaply and would be a good bargain, so without any very serious intention of buying he started for Liverpool, crossed over to New Brighton, examined the wreck, saw that the damage she had received was more apparent than real, so he made an offer for her by private contract. His offer was declined, as it was not considered sufficient, and she came to the hammer, and as it had been announced that she was to be sold without reserve, Isaac Greth bought her at a price which was less by a thousand pounds than he had offered privately.

This was his first stroke of good luck. The second was that when the cargo was unshipped it was found to be so little damaged that it realised more than he had given for it and the ship together. Having got rid of the cargo he had the hull examined by experts, who reported that the injury she had received could be easily repaired, as her timbers were in splendid condition. She had fortunately been built before the era of jerry shipbuilders.

Isaac had her leaks stopped, and waiting for a spring tide he had her floated off. She was taken into dry dock, thoroughly overhauled, put into repair, and turned out as good, if not better, than she was when span new. Isaac Greth got her into an A-1 class at Lloyd's, and with this one ship, whose name of *Good Luck* he still retained, he set up business in Water Street, Liverpool, as a shipowner and shipbroker on his own account, and as he wanted someone to assist him in his business, he sent to Frankfort for his only surviving brother, Jacob Greth.

CHAPTER IX.

WHY DID THIS BOY AND GIRL COME TOGETHER?

ISAAC'S venture proved so successful that in two years' time he was the owner of two more ships, and in five years his fleet had increased to ten. And of these ten ships he was the absolute owner.

During this time Jacob had shown a peculiar aptitude for the business, and a large measure of the success was certainly due to his untiring energy and watchfulness, coupled with great shrewdness and caution. His brother therefore took him in as a partner, and henceforward the business was conducted under the style of "Greth Brothers."

Jacob was in many respects a striking contrast to his brother. He was good-looking; in fact, it may safely be said he was handsome. He was dark-complexioned, had curly black hair, brilliant dark eyes, and white, even teeth. He was something of a dandy too, and studied his personal appearance a good deal. He dressed well, lived well, was fond of society, and was said to be quite a Lothario amongst ladies. Isaac, on the other hand, was very decidedly not handsome. He was always seedy, he always carried a coarse gingham, wore common horn spectacles, smoked the commonest of pipes, and hated, or affected to hate, all womankind. But, as was to be proved subsequently, Isaac Greth was not so indifferent to womanly charms as he would have had the world believe.

The business affairs of Greth Brothers continued to prosper in an almost marvellous manner. Men said of them that whatever they touched it turned to gold. Certainly success followed success; their fleet increased until it was reported that the firm were absolute or part owners of upwards of a hundred ships of various

tonnage, and trading to all parts of the world. With the acquisition of wealth and increasing years, Isaac Greth seemed to grow more miserly, and people wondered why he coveted riches so, seeing that he hadn't "chick nor child" to leave his wealth to. People, however, were a little mistaken, as will be seen.

On the other hand, Jacob took unto himself a wife, purchased a small but handsome house, together with a small estate at Everton, set up his brougham and pair of horses, and went in for collecting art treasures—especially pictures. As may be easily understood, all this was to the disgust of Isaac, who had a great contempt for pomp or parade. He was proud of his success in life, though he never hesitated to proclaim his humble origin. This by no means suited the tastes of his brother, who actually set to work to see if it were not possible to trace his family's descent from some noble ancestor. The nearest approach to it, however, was in his great-great-grandfather, who had held the post of valet in the service of a grand duke. This was something, but it was not much, and Jacob determined to build up a family line of his own, and, as a preliminary to it, he obtained a crest and motto, which he had painted on his carriage panels and stamped on his silver and notepaper.

Although the tastes of the brothers were so dissimilar they were united on one point, and that was the interests of the business. They had commenced in a little, dirty, tumble-down place in Water Street, but now they set about erecting magnificent premises that were more in accord with the reputation and wealth of the firm.

During all these years Isaac was somewhat of a mystery, so far as his private life was concerned. With the precision of clockwork he presented himself every day at a certain snug little hostelry near the water, and there he partook of his meals. It was at this hostelry that he always entertained his friends, for he lived in humble apartments in a by no means fashionable quarter of the town, and he never by any chance asked anyone to these apartments. He did occasionally go out to his brother's grand house at Everton, but it was very seldom, as he used to say it awed him, and he infinitely preferred to smoke his common porcelain pipe and toast his toes over the fire of the hostelry.

Although Isaac Greth was very careful, and, as some people said, very mean, it must not be supposed that he was in any sense of the word a miser. If he did not spend his wealth on himself he did not hesitate to give liberally to different charities, especially in his own country; but, with the modesty characteristic of him, his givings were done without the slightest ostentation, and it was very seldom he would even allow his name to appear. He manifested considerable interest in children, and entirely at his own expense he established an orphanage and a public school. He was essentially a practical man. He rather aimed at being known as one who was utterly without either sentiment or poetry in his nature. He used to say that he belonged to the workers, and not the dreamers—an assertion that was certainly borne out by his life. He was never tired of proclaiming his theory, that every honest and right-minded man could make his way in the world if he only seized the right moment to begin. In spite of this impermeable, shell-like exterior—to use a metaphor—it was hinted, though nobody knew upon what grounds, that the old man had not always been such a misanthrope as he wished the world to believe he was now. It was said he had been crossed in love; but such a man, living such a life, was almost sure to have this said about him.

As the years gathered on his head he appeared more than ever desirous of consolidating the fabric of the business he had built up with so much tact and energy, though he did not hesitate to acknowledge the great assistance rendered him by his brother. But Jacob was more extravagant and more reckless, and had in him a strong spirit of speculation which was wholly wanting in Isaac. The head of the firm did nothing rashly nor without a great deal of preconsideration and forethought. He left nothing to chance. What he did was done by fixed rules well calculated out, and this was no doubt the one grand secret of his success in life. He had earned for his firm a name in the commercial world that was without blenish, and the credit of Greth Brothers had never once been jeopardised.

But the time was now fast coming when the founder and builder of the great concern was to pass away, and a new order of things was to arise.

It has been said that Isaac Greth wished to consolidate his

business, and to that end he had laboured with a persistency that was almost marvellous. What he did he did with a thoroughness of purpose that singled him out as a remarkable man. In his boyhood dreams he had hoped to build up a huge commercial fabric that should pass his name down the grooves of time to generations yet unborn. His ambition was laudable because it was actuated by pure motives. In his manhood he had realised to a large extent the dreams of his early years. If he had had the faculty for writing a book or building a bridge, the book would have been written or the bridge built with the same earnestness, the same grand concentration of energies, that had marked his operations in the commercial world; and literature or engineering would have been enriched by other monuments of human skill. But this was not to be. Isaac knew what his abilities were, and he never for a single instant tried to warp them out of their true bend. Literature and engineering may have suffered, but the busy world of trade is richer for Isaac Greth having lived. Nobody could have predicted, not even he himself, that when he bought the wreck and cargo of the *Good Luck*, as she lay on the New Brighton beach, he was laying the foundation for a stupendous fabric that was to be reared piece by piece, and with ceaseless watching, patient labour, that should dovetail and fit, every atom of it, with a precision that was mathematical and calculated to make it perfect. Yet this is what Isaac had done. His one brain had conceived gigantic ideas, and carried them out with a never-swerving regularity. He did not, as some men have done, begin building at the top, for his keen commercial instincts told him that such a fabric must always be unstable, and crash down before the first adverse breeze that blew upon it. But he started at the beginning; commenced at the A, and was working steadily through the alphabet to Z. But, as will subsequently be seen, he was destined to cease before he reached the Z, for it is not given to any man to attain perfection. No one who has thus far followed the history of Isaac Greth can have failed to see that he was a very honest man; that is, honest in the very fullest acceptance of the word. From the time that he first arrived in London as a young man, with his seedy clothes, his gingham umbrella, his porcelain pipe, his fortune of four marks, three pfenning, and his two words

of English—"Give me," till now, when he was grey with years and labour, Honesty had been his motto. He had so hedged himself about with an immaculate commercial virtue that no living soul could, with truth, point to him and say, "Old Greth is a rascal." The world chose to say that he was mean, but the world did not judge him rightly. It read him by his humbleness, his plainness, his absence of ostentation, his horror of show, his straightforward candour, and his closeness in driving a bargain. But there were other lights in which he ought to have been viewed. From the very moment of his beginning success in London he never forgot his parents, who accompanied him on his way to affluence until their journey ended. If he had made himself he also made his family, to whom he had acted in a princely manner. Then, again, if records had only been kept the world might have been astonished to learn how much of his wealth had flowed down the channels of charity; and though he outwardly affected cynicism, who could have looked on the orphanage and the school without acknowledging that the man's heart was very tender? His bluntness of speech and almost roughness of manner were but the external coarseness of the pure gem.

So far, then, we have followed Isaac Greth on his career until we see him very wrinkled and very grey, as, dressed in a long, faded green coat, a rusty black hat, and a bulging gingham umbrella, he totters down to his favourite hostel by the water side, and as he goes people stop and look at him, and some whisper,

"There's old Greth, the shipowner. A regular old miser, isn't he?"

But these same people in their haste to pass judgment by what was writ on the outside shut their eyes to other things. They appraised his value by his clothes and gingham umbrella, and left out his deeds. They didn't see him stop in his course there, fumble in his pocket for an old greasy leather bag, take a silver coin therefrom, glance round as though he was going to commit a crime, then sneak back and slip the coin into the hand of that beggar-woman. They didn't see him steal into that huckster's shop, purchase several shillings' worth of toys, which, cramming into his pockets, he carried into that reeking, squalid street where a group of pining, sickly children were engaged in the refined art

of mud-pie making, when, much to their utter amazement, the sky rained down a small shower of toys upon them, and an old man in a long, faded green coat slunk away as if he had done murder.

Of course the clever people did not see these things. Why should they? They were trifling deeds, indeed—the deeds of an eccentric old man—but they were chronicled in heaven, because the hungry cripple's hunger was for a time assuaged, and the delighted shouts of the sickly children went up and up, and were echoed behind the stars.

But we must leave Isaac for a time now, in order that we may introduce another and scarcely less important character.

In the office of Greth Brothers, shipowners, of Liverpool, was a young man who was known as Isaac Luck. He was a young man with fair hair, rather large features and a determined if not sullen expression. His age was about three-and-twenty, it might have been a little less or it might have been a little more, but that is of no consequence here. His position at this time was ostensibly that of a clerk, and his salary was two hundred a year. The word "ostensibly" is used because his status was somewhat of an anomaly. He was not subject to the same rules as the others, or if he was he broke them with impunity. What in another clerk would have been followed with instant dismissal was overlooked in him. He was a puzzle to every one in the place, and, as it were, a false note in the harmonious working of the great whole. He produced a certain amount of discord, because men who had been much longer in the firm than he were less favoured. He had but recently returned from India, as he had spent some years in the firm's branch house at Bombay. As may be readily supposed, this young man was the subject of many remarks; some spiteful, some stupid. If Mr. Greth heard these remarks, and it is more than probable he did, he deigned not to make reply. He was as silent as the Sphinx. He knew how to mind his own business, and his business secrets were secrets with him. So he let his people go on wondering, and gave them no sign to guide them, and some suggested that it was because the young clerk was a namesake, though they thought it was rather curious he should be called Luck. If Luck himself was cognisant of the feeling enter-

tained towards him by the employes of the firm, and it is hardly possible he could be ignorant of it, he was as indifferent to it as his master. His habits were reserved; he was silent, even morose. His face was suggestive of a rather brooding, melancholy disposition, though it was noted that before he went to India he had nothing of this. Now he wore the appearance of a man who had been a little dissipated, and who had suffered disappointment.

His career altogether was food for gossip and wonderment, so far as it was known; but the curious could only trammel it up to a day when as a shy boy of nine years of age he was brought to the office by Isaac himself, perched on a high stool, and placed under the care of old Harris, a senior bookkeeper, who was deputed by the chief to look after the lad and train him. This was the boy's beginning, then, so far as the gossips were concerned. The links from then to the first infantile recollections were supplied by the youth himself; from those recollections backward still the link was missing. He knew nothing of father, mother, sisters or brothers, or relations of any kind. What he did know was that from the moment when his baby mind was capable of comprehending he had been one of a number of children, girls and boys, who all lived together in an educational establishment at Epping, near London. There was a great number of children of both sexes in this place. They were well clothed, well fed, and well cared for. The head of the girl's department was Mrs. Gordon, and her husband was chief over the boys.

At this school Isaac Luck passed several years. He did not go home during the holidays as the other children did, but in the summer he was always taken to some seaside place by one of the female teachers, and in the winter he had heaps of toys given to him, and was taken in the course of the season to see the pantomimes at Covent-garden and Drury-lane Theatres. And so in time he came to believe that he was an orphan. But his years were too tender then for him to have any concern about this. He wanted for nothing, and was very happy.

Amongst the female scholars was a sweetly pretty dark-haired and dark-eyed child, called Lena Cheston. And it would seem that Lena must also have been an orphan, for she never went home during the holidays, but was always taken to the seaside and to the

theatres with Isaac, the result being that the boy and girl came to regard each other as sister and brother until one day the teacher who took them away told them they were not related to each other. From that hour they were no longer sister and brother in each other's eyes, but lovers. Yes, lovers! Child lovers of course, but none the less lovers; and it is important that this should be borne in mind, for it was the prologue to a startling drama, as you will learn by-and-by.

The boy used to give the girl his toys, and the girl used to buy sweetmeats and cakes, and give them to the boy.

Those people who are not disposed to believe in Destiny may be asked why did this boy and girl come together? And these same people will probably try to answer the question when they have read the last chapter of this story. Till then let them make no attempt to answer.

Well, Isaac Luck and Lena Cheston had come together, and they were lovers. The fair-haired boy and the dark-haired girl were just as much in love with each other as if they had been older, and their love being children's love was very sweet and very pure.

They made vows, too, like their elders, and said they hoped they might die if they were not true to each other. During this time an episode occurred in their lives that was a pretty little romance, enwrapped in the glamour of childish dreams. They ran away from school. It was on a Saturday afternoon, which was always a half-holiday. They had gone into the village to purchase cakes and sweets in company with some of their school companions. Then it suggested itself to the boy's mind that he and his sweetheart should run away and be married. He laid the daring scheme before her, and she readily acquiesced. They did not know how they were going to get married, nor what marriage meant. But that was a mere detail that gave them no concern. For them in the abstract it was simply being always together, always looking into each other's eyes, always talking pretty things to each other. What more should children want. What more could they want. The awful world of roaring human passions; that world of tears, and sobs and groans, and wrong and hate, and deceit and greed of gain, and uncharitableness that lay beyond the portals of the gate of their childhood was all unknown to them. Nations might tear at each other's throats;

kings be toppled from their thrones; the whole complicated machinery of social, religious, and political life be entirely thrown out of gear; but these things would not affect these children. They lived in a world where Jack the Giant Killer was an awful reality, and where to have doubted the truth of St. George and the Dragon, would have been to have placed oneself for ever and ever under the ban of outraged children. Well, Lena Cheston and Isaac Luck placed their hands together and wandered forth into Epping Forest—that *was* a forest then. They prattled to each other, and talked wondrous wise things, and then munched their gingerbread, ate their sweets, and were happy, so happy. Around them were floods of summer sunshine. The forest was filled with a grand choral symphony; their pathway was a brilliant carpet of living flowers; and butterflies, like winged jewels, sailed through the glittering air.

By-and-by the sunlight faded, the symphony ceased, the butterflies were no longer seen, and a rich, velvety purple gloom enfolded the forest. Then this wondrous wise couple, whose united ages did not amount to twenty years, grew frightened, for childhood loves not darkness; and so, hand in hand, they crept under a tangle of trees, and the boy, taking off his little jacket, spread it over his child wife to keep her warm, and so, locked in each other's embrace, they fell asleep. It was morning when they awoke—a summer morning, full of joy and light, and melodious with woodland harmony. Then the children arose from their leafy couch, and kneeling down, said their prayers, as they had been taught to say them at morning and night at school. That solemn duty finished, the boy wove a chaplet of wild flowers, which he twined round the brow of the girl, kissing her on her dear little mouth the while, and saying—

“Isn't it nice to be husband and wife?”

But the girl had the instincts of her sex, as was only natural, and she asked, “Will you always love me for your little wife, Isaac?”

“Why, of course, I will, Lena. God would be very angry with me if I didn't, you know. I wish a dragon or a giant would come now. I would just show you how I would fight for you. Oh, I do wish I was a knight, and had silver armour and a big sword? I would put you on a white horse then, and take you to a golden palace, and you should have such beautiful things to wear.”

The little wife looked at her little husband, and her little heart was full of a great pride in him, and as the best and most practical way of showing her high appreciation she said, "Kiss me, Isaac!"

And Isaac did kiss her, not only once, but several times.

Then they went forth again hand in hand, but had not gone far before they were discovered by some of a party of searchers who all night long had been anxiously scouring the forest for the truants.

So came to an end their little poem. Alas! the only one that was to be written in their Book of Life.

It was not very long after this that the girl and boy were to taste the bitterness of a real sorrow, and from the world of ideal the boy was to go forth into the world of reality. The sorrow was brought about in this way. One day there came to the school a severe-looking and rather shabbily-dressed man, and Isaac Luck was taken into the room to see him. Isaac was rather frightened of the man. He had never seen him before, and when Mrs. Gordon told the lad to go and "shake hands with the gentleman," he clung to her and refused to do it. His childish fear, however, was soon overcome, but when he heard that after dinner the gentleman was going to take him away, and that he was going in the coach to Liverpool, where he would be a big man and learn a business, he sobbed, and said he didn't want to be a big man nor to learn a business; he wanted to stop with Lena Cheston. But Fate was represented by the shabbily-dressed man, who was Isaac Greth, and little Isaac had to go.

His parting from Lena was touching and pathetic. With childish ingenuousness they hugged and kissed each other and cried bitterly. Then came the moment when they were to say their last good-bye. They parted, but not for ever. They were to meet again.

The two Isaacs rode in a carriage to an hotel, and early the next morning they started by the mail for Liverpool. Isaac Luck's child life had come to an end. His youth life was now to begin.

CHAPTER X.

TO HIS STORMY FUTURE AND STRANGE DESTINY.

WITHOUT entering into explanations as to how Isaac Greth became acquainted with Isaac Luck, it is important to say that his taking the boy to Liverpool and placing him on a high stool in his office was part of a well-thought-out scheme; that scheme which had for its object the consolidating and welding of the great business, as it were. It will be asked, no doubt, how the rich shipowner hoped to consolidate his business by means of a friendless boy of nine? At the first glance it does certainly seem rather a puzzle, but it must be remembered that Isaac Greth had a well-defined purpose in what he did, and he saw a great deal more through his horn spectacles than other men saw. One of the reasons was that he looked to the time when his duty would be finished, and he would pass from the haunts of men, but in order that the machinery which he had created should still work well he wanted to imbue a brain with his ideas, to bend and mould his successor so that he could worthily hold a place of honour in and direct the destiny of a great firm. To do this the coming man must begin very young, for he would have to grow up to and with the business, in order that he might thoroughly comprehend all its manifold threads. But why did he select Isaac Luck as the keystone of his fabric? Ah, that is the question Isaac Greth must answer for himself. He believed that he was doing a great thing for the boy's future, and putting the crown on the edifice of his own structure. If that boy had been a mere piece of mechanism Isaac Greth's plans would have been perfect; but he had to deal with something infinitely more subtle and intricate than anything wrought by the hand of man. This was a human brain and will and a human heart. They were factors in his great sum that

were destined to throw it all wrong, and scatter to the winds the results of his years and years of patient, honest, and sturdy labour. His miscalculation proved his fallibility.

It has already been said that Isaac Greth knew how to keep his own secrets, and he told no one, not even his own brother, why he took so much interest in the lad Luck, nor what his ultimate intentions were with reference to him. But once, and once only, he said this :

“Jacob, when your girl Marguerite and Isaac Luck are old enough they will make a good match, if the lad turns out well.”

Jacob was very much astonished at this remark, for he knew that his brother always looked very far ahead and made his arrangements far in advance. He dwelt upon it for a considerable time, and puzzled and racked his brain to try and determine what his brother's plans were, until at last other matters drove it from his memory.

Marguerite was Jacob's only child, and at the time Isaac Luck came into the firm as a clerk she was seven years of age. Jacob and his wife had hoped for a son, but their hopes had been disappointed. Marguerite was the only child, and so they bestowed upon it all their affection and care—an affection that was intensified, perhaps, by the fact that she was a cripple. An accident at her birth had shortened one of her legs, rendering her extremely lame. For this deformity nature had not even compensated her with good looks. She was plain, but she had a particularly pleasing expression, and an attractive and winsome manner.

During the four years that followed, Isaac Luck made very rapid progress in picking up commercial matters. For the first three years his employer sent him to an excellent night school, in order, as he said, that he might get the groundwork of such an education as was calculated to fit him for the business career he was to pursue. At the end of the three years the schooling ceased. Luck was then twelve years of age, and a fair scholar. He was a particularly smart lad, with a calculating mind, and very keen powers of observation. He had a passion for figures, and, as a result, with the training he had received, he was even at his age a splendid accountant.

In so far as these things were concerned Isaac Greth was

exceedingly pleased with his *protégé*, but in some other respects he was exceedingly disappointed. He noticed that the lad had developed a love for dress and personal appearance, and that there was a certain want of frankness and candour about him that was very distressing to a man so sterling as Greth. The boy was high-spirited and wilful, and had an objection to submit to discipline. He was fully aware that he was indebted to Mr. Greth for much kindness, and he had been frequently heard to express wonder why the "old man," as he disrespectfully called him, took so much interest in him. What annoyed the boy was the "old man's" strictness and sternness, or rather what he was pleased to think was strictness and sternness; and on more than one occasion he had said to some of his fellow-clerks:

"If old Greth is not pleased with me why doesn't he say so. I'm quite willing to go. I don't suppose I should have much difficulty in getting another situation."

This was ingratitude. It came, of course, to Isaac Greth's ears, and he was hurt; but he charitably set it down to youthful thoughtlessness, and he said that as the boy got older he would get wiser. A slight digression is here necessary to say that for two years after Isaac Luck left school at Epping he and Lena Cheston corresponded. Their letters were very childish letters indeed, but nevertheless were brimful of warm, childish expressions of affection and love. On the girl's side this love was a terrible reality, and in her round, text-hand she used to pour out her soul to him. On his side it was a pleasant fiction. At last Mr. Greth became aware that a correspondence was going on between the children; and to his practical mind it seemed too ridiculous that a boy in large white collar and jacket should be scrawling love-letters to a child two years his senior, that he insisted on its being stopped, and stopped it was. Not with any regret on Isaac Luck's part, for he came to think it was a trouble to write letters, and moreover the postage ran away with a lot of his pocket money. When Luck had reached the age of fourteen, Mr. Greth decided upon taking a very important step—very important indeed so far as young Luck was concerned, for it was destined to change the whole current of his career.

It need hardly be remarked that in this, as in all other things,

Isaac was actuated by the very best of motives, and he was only carrying out another part of his prearranged programme. But it was another false move, and was to prove his fallibility in even a more marked manner than anything else. The step he decided on was to send his *protégé* out to Greth Brothers' branch house in Bombay. The youth had now been in the business for five years, and in sending him to India Isaac thought two things. First, that the boy's acquaintances in Liverpool, and which were not of a kind Mr. Greth desired, would be broken off; and second, by going abroad the lad's ideas would be expanded, his views of life would be broadened, and his commercial knowledge increased, while the knowledge he possessed already would be very acceptable and useful in the Bombay house.

The idea of going out to India was one that was peculiarly attractive to Isaac Luck. It is probable—and this is said advisedly—that up to this time most of his instability and restlessness arose from his constant yearning to go to sea—a yearning that Mr. Greth would never before give him the chance of gratifying. And, after all, it was very boyish of Luck to think that his master was arbitrary and cruel, and such a thought necessarily made him lose that respect for the head of the firm he ought to have had, and losing the respect produced a certain recklessness and wild notions of taking matters in his own hands, and discharging himself from his employment. It seemed to him that it would have been the easiest thing in the world, for the head of the firm to send him to sea in one of the firm's ships. So it would have been, but it did not come into the head of the firm's plan, and so to the boy's disgust he was not sent.

Now came the India project, and he was inflamed with it. His dream would be realised; his yearning gratified, and, as he indiscreetly put it, he wouldn't be annoyed any more with the "Governor" constantly "nagging" at him.

Although Isaac Luck failed, as it seems, stupidly, to see that his employer had specially marked him out as a recipient of his bounty and favour, no one else in the office was so blind. The other youthful clerks, of whom there were many, were very jealous, and the older ones were very surprised; in fact, the surprise was shared by all, because hitherto Mr. Greth had been noted for the equitable

manner in which he treated all his employés. Who then, they asked, was this ungrateful youngster that he should be so much favoured? The answer, of course, was not forthcoming. No one there was capable of fathoming what lay behind those horn spectacles of the head of the firm.

There was one other thing too, that was remarked upon. Young Luck was constantly being sent on some errand or another to Jacob Greth's fine house at Everton, and the youth used to come back with marvellous stories of the grandeur of the place, of the way in which he had been treated, and how Miss Greth took him about the grounds, and through the green and hot houses. In this latter respect it was thought that the boy was drawing the long bow, but it was quite true nevertheless. A few days previous to the day appointed for Luck to sail, Mr. Greth told him that he wanted him to accompany him to Everton, and carry a small box for him. Luck was very pleased at this, for he liked to go to Jacob's house, because, as he himself put it, he always got plenty of good things.

It was seldom that Isaac went out to Everton, and never before had he gone in company with his *protégé*. Whenever he did go, a very plain dinner was always provided, because he detested formal dinners, and could never be persuaded to dine out for that very reason. The plain dinner was provided on this particular day, and Isaac expressed a desire that the boy should dine with the family. When the dinner was ended, Isaac retired to the smoking-room to smoke his porcelain pipe, whither he was followed by poor lame Marguerite, who was very fond of her uncle, and he was equally fond of her. As she sat on his knee—for he liked to nurse her—and as he played with her curls he asked in an unconcerned sort of way,

“Marguerite, what do you think of that lad Luck?”

“How do you mean, uncle?” she queried, innocently.

“Well, I mean, what is your opinion of him?”

“I think he is a very nice boy,” she answered, ingenuously.

Isaac asked no further question, made no further remark on this subject. His niece's answer seemed to satisfy him.

Later on he went with her to the playroom, and he took Luck with him. Her father had had this room fitted up specially for

her use, and it was replete with almost everything that a child could desire.

Isaac took up a book and seemed to become very much absorbed in it, but in reality the book interested him not an iota; he was watching the children from behind his spectacles, and he appeared to be very pleased as he noticed the kindly way in which they spoke to each other. She was delighted in showing him all her things, and the boy expressed great pleasure in looking at them. Whatever the motive was, and it is pretty certain he had a very strong motive in bringing the children together, he was satisfied with it. Later on, as he was going home in company with Luck, he said in his characteristic blunt way,

“What is your opinion of my niece, boy?”

Luck was somewhat confused by the question, as it was only natural a boy should be, but he blurted out,

“I like her, sir, very much.”

“Oh, that’s your opinion, is it?” Isaac remarked, drily, as a smile of complacency played about his mouth. “Well, I’m glad of it,” he said, and then the subject dropped, and he did not refer to it again.

When Isaac Greth decided on sending Isaac Luck to Bombay, the influence of some malignant star must have been at work, otherwise the man’s plans could never have miscarried, as they were destined to miscarry through this step. If he had sent him to Kamtschatka, Timbuctoo, the North Pole, or in fact anywhere in the world but Bombay, he might possibly have been able to say that his judgment was all but infallible. But by this very act, which he considered was likely to be so beneficial in every respect, he was unsapping the foundations of his firm, and sowing the seeds of future calamity and trouble.

If he had only taken that boy seven years before he did, and had moulded and worked him, as he would have moulded and shaped wax, he might have given him the exact bent he wished. But those seven years had served to develop the latent fires of Luck’s nature. Had they been dealt with early they might have been stamped out. Now they had taken too strong a hold, and seemed likely to burn fiercely. He wanted to be kept very firmly in hand indeed, and in not recognising this fact Isaac Greth made a fatal mistake. In sending the boy away he was turning him loose

from the harness that had hitherto restrained his movements. People who saw from a different point of view, saw how dangerous it was to allow a youth so constituted as Luck was to be removed from restricting influences. But Mr. Greth had his own standpoint, and viewed accordingly. He wished to make the boy's future, and he conscientiously believed that in sending him to India, he was doing the very best thing that could possibly be done for him. Isaac Greth had a prescient mind, and in his business career it had served him admirably. But it failed him now at the very moment it was most needed; though had he foreseen the terrible consequences—consequences in which tragedy was to play a part—that would ensue from Luck's journey to India, he would have shrank back appalled; nay, it is hardly too much to say that he might have been tempted to flog the boy to death, rather than let him have the chance of adding another page to the world's great volume of human wickedness and wrong. The day came for Luck to start. He was to go out in a ship named after the head of the firm, the *Isaac Greth*; and in order that he should not be idle during the voyage he was to act as assistant clerk to the supercargo.

It was Isaac's invariable custom to go on board of every ship belonging to the firm just before she sailed, in order that he might judge for himself that all was right; and following out this custom he was on board of the *Isaac Greth* as she hauled out of the dock, and, much to the surprise of everyone, he announced his intention of proceeding with her as far as Holyhead, and returning with the pilot-boat. Fortunately the wind was fair; and so, amid a good deal of excitement, the vessel got under weigh and proceeded down the river under easy canvas.

The following day she hove to off Holyhead to allow her owner to leave her. Before he went he called his *protégé* to him on the poop, and laying his hand on the boy's head, said impressively, but with his usual bluntness—"Boy, the moment has come when you and I must part. You are going a long journey to a far-distant land. You are practically taking the threads of your life into your own hands; see to it that you don't entangle them. Your name is Isaac; so is mine. For my sake, then, keep your name bright with honour. Be upright, and fear no man. Before you lies the

future. Walk into it with a bold heart, and do your duty to yourself, to your fellow-men, and to the world. We may never meet again. If we don't, remember what I've said to you. Let your watchwords be 'Honour and Duty.' Now, goodbye, and God bless you."

He patted the lad's head and shook his hand warmly. Those who witnessed the parting scene averred that they had never before seen Mr. Greth so moved. They noticed that there was a shake in his voice, and his hand trembled. However much Isaac Greth might have been affected, Isaac Luck was not much moved, and he was heard to remark as he turned away,

"I'm very glad the governor's gone, for he's always either preaching at me or nagging at me."

Mr. Greth stood up in the pilot-boat and waved a farewell as the great vessel slowly swung round to the wind, and spreading her white canvas sailed away towards the lonely ocean, carrying the boy Isaac Luck to his stormy future and strange destiny.

CHAPTER XI.

IN BOMBAY.

IT is important that we continue to follow Isaac Luck, in order that we may bring events up to the point at which we find them at the beginning of this history. The *Isaac Greth* made a fair average passage out to her destination. Nothing special occurred to call for mention. She went through the usual experiences of a voyage of this kind. She ran down the N.E. trades. She struggled through the tropical squalls near the equator. She lay in the doldrums like a log on a burning sea. She picked up the S.E. trades, and bowled along merrily for several weeks. Sunshine and shadow, calm and storm, alternated. Then came expectant days, when all hands were straining their eyes to catch the first sight of the welcome land. Paint pots and scrubbers were brought out. Platforms in bowlines were slung over the sides, and the sailors painted her up. Her masts were scraped bright and varnished until they flashed in the sun. Her decks were scrubbed and holystoned until they were white as swansdown. From its cavernous recess in the dark depths of the forehold, the ponderous chain cable was brought, passed through the hawse pipes, and bent on to the shackles of the great anchors that were acant at the knight-heads. Then came the joyful cry, "Land ho!" The way of the ship was stopped until the pilot was taken on board, then her sails were set again, and with stately pride she glided into the grand and wonderful harbour of Bombay. It was a novel and entrancing scene to Isaac Luck. The details of the vast panorama were like a picture from the Arabian Nights. The teeming life on the water, and the teeming life on the shore, the hundreds of ships, the flags of all nations, the moving boats of every shape and build, the unwieldy cargo barges, the dusky natives, the palms, the white houses,

the glittering sea, the blue heavens, and over all the magic of the burning Indian sunlight. Such was the picture !

As soon as the *Isaac Greth* had dropped her anchors a boat came alongside flying the house flag of the firm, and a white-headed gentleman mounted to the deck. This was Mr. John Tremaine, the manager of the branch house in Bombay. He was a portly gentleman, with a florid complexion, a bright eye, and a long gray beard. He had been advised of Luck's coming, and told to look after him, and see that he was well lodged and well taken care of.

Mr. Tremaine shook Isaac's hand and welcomed him to Bombay, and subsequently took him ashore with him and to his own house until such time as suitable apartments could be found for the boy. Mr. Tremaine occupied a pretty bungalow in the suburbs of the town, outside the fortifications. His family consisted of his wife, three daughters, and two sons. Both the sons were employed in the branch house of Greth Brothers. The family were English, and highly respectable and respected.

Mrs. Tremaine was a buxom lady, considerably younger than her husband, but portly and matronly, and full of fine womanly instincts and keen sympathies. She soon took a motherly interest in the young stranger, an interest that was intensified when she learnt that he had no parents and no relations that he knew. In the letter from the firm in Liverpool to Mr. John Tremaine, the manager in Bombay, advising him that Isaac Luck was coming out, were these somewhat remarkable instructions,

"You will consider the boy as being in your charge and care, and so far as it is in your power to do so, you will prevent him forming a serious connection with any of the female acquaintances he may make. He has already shown a disposition to be a little wild, and it will be necessary to deal with him very firmly, at the same time gently. You will pay him his salary regularly every quarter, and you are particularly charged to see that under no circumstances is he to be allowed at any time to anticipate his salary. As soon as he lands you will give him the sum of fifty rupees ; and a month later a further sum of fifty rupees. These two payments are in addition to his first quarter's salary, which you will pay at the proper time. They are a gift from the firm to

prevent his getting into debt, a thing which we are particularly anxious you should prevent his doing if possible."

Mr. Tremaine was a little alarmed as he read these orders, for he felt that a rather grave responsibility was put upon his shoulders. Virtually Isaac Greth made him the guardian of the lad. Not an enviable position by any means; but Mr. Tremaine was not the man to shirk duty, and as this was obviously a duty that was imposed upon him he resolved to carry it out to the best of his ability. Young Luck thus began his career under favourable auspices, and with chances opening before him that did not often fall to the lot of a youth like him. The new kind of life pleased him very much. Everything was so totally different to Liverpool, and he took an enthusiastic, boyish interest in everything around him, and for a time he gave promise of being a very useful addition to the business. Mr. Tremaine was decidedly pleased with him. As he expressed it, he saw in him the makings of a splendid man of business. He was smart, clever, an excellent accountant, and a good writer. What the manager did not admire, however, were exactly the things Mr. Greth had had cause to complain about. The youth had almost a silly girl's love for finery; and there was a want of frankness about him that couldn't fail to strike one. He had a habit of looking away from a person when speaking to him, and he was much given to answering evasively any questions that were asked in reference to his doings.

Notwithstanding these little drawbacks, he became a favourite in the manager's family, and was a frequent visitor to the house.

And so Isaac Luck completed his first year in Bombay without anything special calling for note. His quickness in and aptitude for figures led Mr. Tremaine to place him in the cargo department, and the consequence was Luck was out a great deal, as he had to spend much time on board the different vessels belonging to the firm, especially when they were loading for England or some other port. This work was very congenial to the young man, and he was thrown much in contact with the crews and captains of the ships.

He was now turned sixteen, but looked two or three years older, and he was very vain at this time of being thought a man, and so did all he could to create an impression that his years were more

than they were. He was certainly very manly in his bearing, and no one would have judged him to be as young as he really was. With mixing so much with the sailors he acquired certain habits which would have been better to have avoided. He became an inveterate smoker, and as sailors say, "He could take his tot with any man." That is, he learned to drink as well. This statement must be qualified by saying that "learned to drink" is not to be understood as meaning that he drank to drunkenness, but he was capable of imbibing more than most boys of his age. Being so much on board the ships temptation came in his way a good deal, as there were generally plenty of wines and spirits provided for the use of the officers, and for people who either had business on board or came on board to inspect the berths with a view to engaging a passage. It is more than likely that even this habit had its origin in the vanity of youth, for he, like most lads, thought it was manly to be able to smoke and drink.

About this time a little *contretemps* occurred that placed him under a temporary shadow with Mr. Tremaine and his family. This gentleman's youngest daughter Ada was a very pretty girl, about Luck's own age, and it had been noticed for some time that he exhibited a partiality for the girl's company whenever he went to the house. No importance, however, was attached to this; but some annoyance was felt one day—it was a holiday—when it was found that without mentioning it beforehand he arranged a private meeting with her, and they went out together in a boat fishing in the harbour. They were away some hours, and it was only when the girl's absence gave rise to uneasiness that inquiry led to its being discovered. No serious view was taken of this little escapade, but Mr. Tremaine felt it to be a duty he owed to himself and family to hint to Luck that he was not to come to the house again for some time. Several months passed, and the affair was forgotten by the Tremaines, until it was again revived by a painful circumstance. Mrs. Tremaine noticed that Ada was wearing a pretty little ruby ring made of Indian gold. Very naturally she asked her daughter where the ring came from. With great reluctance she confessed that it was a gift from Isaac Luck, and further questioning revealed the fact that she and Isaac had not only been secretly meeting, but carrying on a secret correspondence. Mr. Tremaine

was very angry this time, although he showed his anger in a mild manner, but he nevertheless forbade Isaac ever to go to the house again, and he sent Ada to some friends at an up-country station.

This affair was not in itself very serious perhaps. It was a girl and boy flirtation, such as girls and boys have been guilty of from time immemorial. But it had this effect: Luck lost the advantage of the influence and culture of the Tremaine's home, and it made Mr. Tremaine mistrustful of him. That gentleman very naturally felt that his hospitality had been abused and his confidence betrayed, and he could not altogether have the same feeling and bearing for and towards the young man. He became more strict with him, and allowed him less freedom of action. As a result, Isaac silently revolted. He could not brook restraint, and though he made no open show of his feelings, he declined to ever give the manager any account of his doings after business hours. To use a political phrase, the relations between the two became strained, and Mr. Tremaine was rather at a loss how to act, as Luck was not guilty of any actual dereliction of duty.

Another year went by, and Isaac Luck's conduct during that time may best be gathered from the following letter, which, as "private and confidential," Mr. Tremaine sent to the head of the firm, Isaac Greth, in Liverpool:—

"In reply to the letter which you have done me the honour of addressing to me, asking for full and private information with regard to the young man Isaac Luck, I would like to say, with the most respectful deference, that I should have preferred that you had laid this duty upon some other shoulders. But since you desire it, I will place you in possession of such facts as have come directly under my own observation, though I may be allowed to preface what I have to tell by saying that I am very desirous indeed of avoiding everything that I have not substantiated in the fullest possible manner. And I beg to suggest, sir, that even you should not attach too much weight to the youth's conduct, as it is highly probable that as he grows older he will become steadier.

"Acting on your first instructions to me, I endeavoured to exercise vigilance and authority over the boy's movements. He was a frequent guest at my house until I discovered that he had been carrying on a ridiculous flirtation with my youngest daughter.

I considered that the best way to stop this was to request him not to visit us again for some time. The matter was forgotten until we were shocked to find that he was secretly meeting and corresponding with her. I felt compelled then to take more severe steps, so I sent my girl away and kept Luck to his duties with a strictness that I had not deemed necessary before. I have not a single word to say against him, so far as these duties are concerned, but I soon found out that in his own time he was frequenting places and keeping company that, to say the least, it was very undesirable he should have anything to do with. To give proof of this, I may inform you that there is a notorious house here kept by an unprincipled Portuguese, named Mello Cabral. I believe that he was formerly a convict. He made his appearance here some years ago and opened a sailors' grog-shop. With the money that he thus acquired he enlarged his place and dignified it with the name of 'Cabral's Hotel and Boarding-house.' It is much frequented by sailors. Billiards, cards, and dominoes are played all day and all night long; while there is a band of music at night as an extra attraction, and dancing is indulged in. This place has long been a curse to Bombay, but unfortunately we are powerless to get it removed. Of course it draws together all sorts of characters, and especially the fast youths of both sexes of the town. It is with grief of no ordinary kind that I inform you that Isaac Luck has become a frequenter of Cabral's Hotel, and his evenings are mostly spent there now. You will, I am sure, sir, recognise the difficult position in which I am placed, for while being most anxious to exercise the supervision over the young man's movements you desired me to do, it comes not within my province to control him after business hours. In fact, I am convinced that, were I to attempt to do this, he would resent it, and it is not improbable by any means that he would throw up his situation and transfer his services to our rivals, Morton, Jellalee and Co., who, I am assured, would be very glad to receive him. The last item of news it is my unpleasant duty to convey is that he has contracted a number of small debts in the town, which, in the aggregate, amount, I believe, to about a thousand rupees. I have also heard, but at the moment of writing am unable to confirm the report, that he has purchased a horse and buggy, which he keeps

in Cabral's stables. I shall be glad to have your instructions as to how I am to act in the matter, and you may rely on my strictly carrying out any orders you may be pleased to send me.—Your obedient servant,
JOHN TREMAINE."

This letter called forth a characteristic reply from the head of the firm. It ran as follows :—

"Ascertain from Luck himself, or through any other source you can, what his debts amount to, and pay them. Keep him well to his duties, but do not display any harshness towards him. His wild-oat-sowing will, I suppose, go on in spite of us; the only thing is to try and keep him within bounds. Should an opportunity occur for you to send him away for a time do so, as it might be the means of breaking him off from some of the bad habits he seems to have acquired. In all your dealings with him, I beg that you will exercise great discretion and tact; and in the matter of his liabilities you will give him to understand that I discharge these in order that he may not bring disgrace upon himself, but that he must not look for a like indulgence in the future."

On the receipt of this letter, Mr. Tremaine requested Isaac Luck to come to him in his private office. When he appeared, he said to him,

"I am very sorry, Mr. Luck, to hear rumours in the town that do not altogether reflect creditably upon your good name. I would fain hope that some of these rumours are rumours only, but unfortunately those referring to the debts you have contracted seem to be too true."

Luck reddened very much as he asked,

"How do you know, sir, that I am in debt?"

"It does not seem to me to be at all necessary that I should give you my sources of information, but my duty is to make you acquainted with a communication I have received from our Liverpool house. That communication is that I have been instructed to pay your debts up to a reasonable amount, so that I shall feel obliged if you will furnish me with details in order that I may be in a position to carry out my instructions."

Isaac Luck seemed utterly amazed, and his face wore rather an incredulous expression as though he thought the news was too good to be true.

"You are not trifling with me, sir, are you?" he asked.

"I am not in the habit of trifling with anyone," the manager answered.

"Of course the orders you have received come from Mr. Greth?"

"They do."

"It is very kind of him," Isaac remarked.

"It is. It's more than kind, and you ought to be deeply grateful. Mr. Greth is one in a thousand."

There was a pause, and then Luck asked quickly,

"Mr. Tremaine, can you tell me why the governor takes so much interest in me?"

"No, I can not; but I should like to remark that you are a very fortunate young man, and if you study your own interests you will do nothing that can displease Mr. Greth. And if you take my advice you will break off your present acquaintances, and cease to visit such dens as Cabral's."

Isaac evidently did not like the manager's remarks, and he asked in a rather sharp and pointed way,

"Have you any fault to find with me, sir, in the performance of my duties?"

"On the contrary," said Mr. Tremaine, quickly, "I have nothing but praise to give you in that respect."

"Then I don't see what business it is of anyone's what I do in my own time," returned Isaac, rather insolently.

"I am not going to discuss that point with you," said the manager, decisively and severely. "If you are so blind as not to see where your interest lies, and so ungrateful as to disregard the wishes of those who are anxious to promote your welfare, you must take your own course. I have neither the time nor inclination to be constantly watching over you."

From this hour Isaac took a very decided dislike to the manager, though he was careful not to come to anything like an open rupture. He steadily performed his duties, but he showed no disposition whatever either to abandon his haunts or his companions. His debts were duly paid, and he lost no time in contracting new ones. He believed now that all he had to do if he got into difficulties was to appeal to his employer for assistance. He felt certain that for

some cause which he could not define, or even find a plausible reason for, Mr. Greth was bound to look after him, and this idea having taken hold of him served to make him more reckless than before.

In the course of a few months from this time, an opportunity occurred for Mr. Tremaine to carry out the other request made by Isaac Greth, which was to send Luck away for a while. One of the Crescent liners, called the *Flower of the Sea*, then lying at Bombay, was ordered to take in ballast and proceed to Calcutta for a cargo. It happened that Greth Brothers had a great quantity of coal lying at Bombay, and as they had no market for it Mr. Tremaine decided to put a quantity of it into the *Flower of the Sea*, and send Isaac Luck as supercargo to sell the coal when he got to Calcutta.

Luck was delighted at the idea of going away. He had long wanted to see Calcutta. And so he started, little dreaming how Fate was urging him on to the worst thing that could possibly befall him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FACE IN THE CROWD.

IN due course Isaac Luck found himself in the so-called "City of Palaces." Here, having no one to restrain him, he gave rather free rein to his inclinations, and being a representative of the great house of Greth Brothers, he was soon drawn into a class of society that was well calculated to hurry on the mischief that had already begun.

Calcutta swarmed, as it always does, with a great army of human vultures, ever on the look-out for prey—adventurers of all classes, men who lived on their wits, loafers and touts, crimps and black-legs. Luck was a young man who seemed to possess some influence in the firm; or at anyrate he was holding a responsible position, and so the harpies thought he was too good a bird to go unplucked. He was fawned upon and flattered. He was taken to places where cards were played for money, and much villanous liquor was consumed. He was driven out to the country in flash buggies, and invited to take part in some races that were being got up on the Maidan. Of course, it will be understood that all these things were not done without a design. The men who pampered to his vanity in this way, were men who hoped to make something out of him; that is to get business from him on behalf of the firm, though, as a matter of fact, the only business he had in hand was the selling the coal. Amongst the gentlemen who came on board as soon as the ship was moored, and introduced himself to the supercargo, was an Israelite of a very pronounced type, and this person presented his card to Isaac, on which was inscribed—

"MR. SAMUEL BEHRENS,
Shipchandler, Shipbroker, Stevedore,
CARGOES PURCHASED OR WAREHOUSED.
CREWS PROCURED,
AND ALL BUSINESS CONNECTED WITH SHIPPING TRANSACTED."

Mr. Samuel Behrens was a man who made his presence felt. He was noisy, fussy, obtrusive, loud-voiced, big-featured, and excessively vulgar. He wore the most immaculate of shirts and a great profusion of jewellery. He spoke very quickly, and with a lisp. He had moist red lips, and small, dark, hawk-like eyes. Mr. Samuel Behrens was wealthy, and not only notorious, but a power in the City of Palaces. Samuel Behrens, though a fictitious name is not a fictitious character. His name was known nearly all over India as a man who "made advances" to officers both in the army and navy, or, in fact, to anybody from whom he could squeeze good security and exorbitant interest. Many a subaltern and young man who had gone to India full of hope and promise was utterly ruined and wrecked by this man. He lived in magnificent style at Chowringee, and, it was said, kept a perfect harem. He died worth upwards of a million of money. His death, however, was antecedent to the date with which we are dealing, though for the purposes of the story he is introduced. He had at one time been the stevedore for the Crescent liners, but lost the business through sharp practice, which the firm would not tolerate. Since then he had never lost an opportunity of trying to get back his position. Young Luck therefore became a special mark for Behrens' attention. Luck was in charge of the cargo, and had the power of selling it; and the Jew, who never lost the slightest opportunity of trying to get in once more with the firm, thought it was just possible he might make this young greenhorn a stepping-stone to this end.

The man was an utter stranger to Luck, who was rather dazzled by the fellow's jewels and shirt-front.

"I hear you've got some coal on board," Mr. Behrens remarked, with a fussy and salivary splutter.

"Yes."

"Have you a market for them?"

"No. Not that I'm aware of."

"Look here, dear boy, let me do this little business for you. I'll plant them well, and make it worth your while. Come on shore with me and have a bit of luncheon and a bottle of fiz at Spence's."

Luck began to think himself an important personage, and he

was flattered by the patronage of this bejewelled Jew. He did not hesitate to accept the invitation, and so went on shore in Mr. Behrens' private dingy, that was decorated in a costly manner with crimson cloth and gold gilding.

Spence's was a famed house, and was the resort of captains, officers, military and naval men, merchants, and visitors.

Everybody in the place seemed to know Mr. Behrens. They nodded to him, greeted him with a certain amount of deference, and made way for him. The waiters bowed obsequiously, and the landlord left his other customers to come and pay homage to the Jew. Of course it was Mr. Behrens' money that was worshipped, not the man himself. He was detested. He spent with a lavish hand, but it was always with a selfish motive.

With patronising and impertinent familiarity he introduced Luck to the landlord and others as "a young friend of mine."

The luncheon he ordered was sumptuous, and the champagne the best of its kind. Isaac was dazed by all the lavishness, and gazed on the big, broad-shouldered Israelite and his flashing diamonds with something akin to awe.

Before the luncheon was finished Luck had entered into an agreement with the Jew, to let him have the selling of the cargo of coals. Behrens was too 'cute not to see his chance here to once more get some of the firm's business into his own hands again. So he bought the coals himself at a much better price than that which ruled in the market, though it was pretty certain that he saw his way clear not only to get his money back but to make a profit.

"Come up and dine with me, dear boy, to-morrow night," he had said to Luck, and so Isaac found himself at the palatial residence of Mr. Behrens in Chowringhee. A very fat and dark-skinned woman sat at the head of the table, and she was introduced as Mrs. Behrens. She seemed to be almost covered with diamonds, and wore choice flowers in her dark hair. She was coarse and vulgar, like her husband, but very good-looking. Two youths were introduced as the sons, and three girls as the daughters. Their ages varied very much, but they all bore the unmistakable stamp of Behrens. There was the same vulgar and lavish display of jewellery and dress, even in the youngest girl, who certainly was not more than eight years of age.

The room was elegantly furnished, the table was elegantly served. The punkahs that swung from the ceilings were embroidered silk, and the curtains that hung at the doors were amber satin. All the plate was sterling silver, and the dessert knives were genuine gold. Is it any wonder that inexperienced Isaac Luck should be fascinated with all this splendour of wealth, which blinded him to the vulgarity of the family? But silver and gold were silver and gold, whether owned by Jew or Gentile; and vulgarity could not alter the quality of the viands nor the flavour of the wines, which were superb. Isaac began to think himself somebody of importance, and his mind was inflamed with desire to be the owner of such a place.

A little later he and his new-made friend adjourned to a verandah, where coffee and cigars were served under the brilliant starlit sky.

"I promised you a little commission," Mr. Behrens remarked, as, having lit a cigar and helped himself to cognac, he took from his pocket-book two bank-notes for two hundred and fifty rupees each, and pushed them across the table to his guest.

Luck had never before felt so much of a man. To be sitting there in that great personage's house, drinking coffee and smoking choice cigars, impressed him as being rather a man-of-the-world and gentlemanly-sort-of-thing.

The notes rather startled him, however, and he hesitated. If he had been foolish and reckless, he had certainly been honest, and he wasn't quite clear that this was an honest transaction. "What would Mr. Greth think of it?" he asked himself.

Mr. Samuel Behrens noticed the hesitation, and with a laugh and in his spluttering way he exclaimed,

"Why, dear boy, what's the matter with the flimsies that you don't take them, eh?"

"Nothing," answered Luck, "but I am not sure whether I ought to take them."

"Not sure," roared Mr. Behrens. "Not sure whether you ought to take what you've earned. Why, dear boy, if that is your idea you are too good for this wicked world. The transaction is perfectly *bona fide*, and commission is always paid in such matters. It's the custom all over the world."

"If that is really the case, then, I shouldn't object," said Luck.

"It is the case. Surely you ought to know that. You've put this little business in my hands, and I wish to acknowledge the service, and if at any time I can be of use pray command me."

Luck hesitated no longer. The sum was too tempting to let it pass, so he picked the notes up, saying as he did so,

"Well, if you think I'm not doing wrong I'll take them."

"Wrong! How, in the name of common-sense, can it be wrong? You might as well say it's wrong for the firm of Greth Brothers to make a profit on their business. You see I've bought the coals at a higher price than they could have got in the open market, and I pay you a commission as the agent who has carried out the transaction. That's the whole sum and substance of the affair, dear boy; and as the amount is so trifling don't mention anything more about it."

Isaac was quite convinced now, and more than ever impressed with a sense of his own importance and the Jew's generosity.

Isaac had received instructions to remain in Calcutta until the *Flower of the Sea* had finished loading, and until another of the fleet, then on her way from England, had discharged her cargo.

Like all the arrangements that had been made for Isaac Luck, this one was determined purely, as it was thought, in his interest. Mr. Greth was under the impression that by shifting his quarters for a time Isaac would be removed from the sphere of temptation, and that when he returned to Bombay he would have wisdom enough to see that it was prejudicial to his welfare to fall back into his old habits.

In all his plans for Isaac, Mr. Greth showed an anxious and affectionate solicitude, but his calculations were always disarranged by the youth himself, whose wayward and wilful disposition made him most difficult to deal with. How far this disposition might have been checked had Mr. Greth kept him in Liverpool, and under his own personal care, it is difficult to say; but one thing was clear beyond all doubt, and that was, that allowing him to go abroad was a mistake, and that sending him to Calcutta was about the very worst thing that could possibly have been done. In Bombay Mr. Tremaine's influence, small as it was, restrained him so far that he did not openly commit himself. In Calcutta he had no

such restraint. It is true that the firm had agents there, but they had no control, except in a purely business way, over Luck. The result of all this was that Luck's stay in the City of Palaces was marked by excesses that were painful, but which there is not the slightest necessity to chronicle.

His acquaintance with Mr. Samuel Behrens deepened and strengthened. This gentleman very probably felt that he might in some way be able to use Luck, who, it was obvious, was not without a modicum of influence in the firm, and so he pandered in every possible way to the young man's vanity, driving him about in his swell turn-out and taking him to places where money and influence were the passports. At the Jew's house, too, Luck was a constant visitor, and Mrs. Behrens pretended to be very fond of him. This lady never stirred out until the fashionable hour, in the cool of the evening. Then she was hoisted into her gorgeously painted and luxuriously lined carriage, and was driven to the promenade in the Eden Gardens during the time that the band played.

I say she was hoisted into her carriage, because that is the best way of indicating the process that had to be gone through. She was enormously stout and immensely heavy, and the coachman, the syce, and several of the other servants had to unite their strength to help her to mount; but when once she was in she sank down on the soft cushioned seat like a graceful behemoth, and arranging her costly shawls and laces about her, exposed a large expanse of her well-powdered neck and bust, on which thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds glittered. She fanned herself with the air of one who believed she was the personification of grace, beauty, virtue, and dignity.

It is almost needless to say that no one having the slightest regard for his respectability ever condescended to notice this bediamonded mass of vulgarity. In the Eden Gardens, from four to half-past six, the wealth, beauty, and fashion of Calcutta aired itself, from the Governor-General and his wife downwards. Amongst this gay and brilliant throng Mrs. Behrens rode, but though amongst them she was not of them, though, poor creature, she fondly imagined that she was as much an object of interest as the Governor-General's lady. So she was, but in the opposite way

to what she supposed. The promenade was a public one, and so she had as much right there as anyone else, but she was none the less ostracised.

One of her frequent companions now in these carriage airings was Isaac Luck. It is doubtful if he understood or realised the force of public opinion at this time. At any rate, if he did he defied it, for he felt it was rather a grand thing to sit in this splendid carriage, and be smiled upon by the mountain of flesh opposite him, who carried about her person many thousands of pounds' worth of jewellery, and was bowed and scraped to by her servants and lacqueys as if she had been a duchess or princess. It was the nearest approach to real grandeur that he had ever been able to attain, and his vanity was gratified. It chanced one evening when he was the companion of Mrs. Behrens that a carriage passed him in which were seated a middle-aged, grey-haired, stately lady with a sorrowful face, and a young lady plainly but neatly dressed. The carriage in which they were seated was in the row that was slowly moving down the promenade, as Mrs. Behrens' carriage slowly moved up.

As Isaac's eyes fell upon the young woman a strange feeling came over him, that feeling that one experiences when suddenly meeting in a strange land a person whom he knows, and whom he never expected to see there. The face of the young woman was familiar enough, but where had he seen it before, and whose was it?

The carriage moved on, and the young woman passed out of his sight. But long he sat in silence, puzzling his brain trying to remember where he and that young woman had met before. At last he pooh-poohed the notion that he knew her, and tried to dismiss it from his mind. For a time he succeeded in doing this; but it came back with twofold force during the night, and he could not help thinking that he and the owner of the face were acquaintances. But try as he would he could not call to mind any circumstances that would give a clue. And ultimately he began to think that he was quite mistaken, for there was no one that he could possibly remember who was likely to be in Calcutta and riding in a carriage in company with a grey-haired lady.

In a few days he had quite forgotten the incident, save now and

again, when like a gleam of light it flashed through his brain and was gone again.

He found himself pretty busy now, for the vessel he had been waiting for had come in, and he had to spend his days in tallying the cargo as it was discharged. His evenings, however, were mostly spent at the house of the Behrens, or with Mr. Behrens in some of that gentleman's favourite haunts.

It cannot be denied that at this time he did give way to a good deal of excess. Mr. Behrens' acquaintances were not of the kind calculated to improve a young man. There was too much billiard and card playing, too much smoking and drinking, too much turning night into day.

Like all seaports where large numbers of sailors and soldiers congregate, to say nothing of the pariahs they bring in their wake, there was a good deal of this reckless sort of life. Young men abandoned themselves freely to it, and called it "sowing their wild oats;" but the sowing was like sowing the wind to reap the whirlwind, and the harvest was generally ghastly enough, as it must ever be where physical and moral laws are outraged.

It is possible, and yet there is no telling, that had Isaac Luck had some near relations with whom he could have corresponded, and from whom he might have heard, he would have been less wild. Certain it is, he had come to feel that he was very lonely in the world. He used to hear other young men talking of the "mail coming in," and of the letters they expected from home. But the mail made no difference to him. He never got any letters from home, for he had no home and no one to write to him. He would dwell upon this, and, as was but natural, he became somewhat of a cynic, and lost a good deal of self-respect.

Once more he found himself the occupant of Mrs. Behrens' carriage in the drive in the Eden Gardens. It was Sunday evening, and a brilliant throng of gaily dressed people were enjoying the cool breeze after a fervid day.

The great river Hooghly, as it rolled on its course to the sea, was slowly gathering the shadows to its tawny bosom; and the forests of masts and rigging were showing like delicate tracery against the beryl light in the sky that was still aglow with the aftermath of the setting sun. Suddenly that face that had troubled Isaac a few

weeks ago came before him. Not as a vision, but a reality. There were the same carriage, the same staid, sorrowful-looking grey-haired lady, and the same young one sitting opposite her.

"Whose carriage is that, Mrs. Behrens?" Isaac asked, quickly, pointing to the one he meant.

"Oh, that's General Gascoigne's widow. Her husband was killed on the Afghan frontier a few months ago."

"And who is the young woman with her?"

Mrs. Behrens spoke angrily, and with a sort of snarl, as she answered—

"Oh, she's a governess in the family. The dirty little cat. My husband was mad about her at one time, and I think he would have given half his wealth for her."

"Do you know her name?"

"Yes. It's Cheston."

"Lena Cheston," Isaac gasped, as his heart sprang into his mouth.

"Yes, Lena Cheston. Do you know her?"

CHAPTER XIII.

“THE SENTIMENT OF HIS YOUTH WAS NOT QUITE KILLED.”

“**Y**ES. Well, that is, I did know her years ago. She and I were at school together,” Isaac answered. “But perhaps it’s not the same; and yet it must be, for I recognise the face perfectly.”

“She’s a hussy,” growled Mrs. Behrens.

“Why do you say that?” asked Isaac, rather sharply, as the recollection of his boyish love came back.

“Because I believe she encouraged my husband.”

Isaac did not like to hear this about his once child-sweetheart. He had forgotten her for years, and now suddenly, though he knew nothing of her as a woman, he felt jealous and annoyed.

“Do I understand you that there was some flirtation between Miss Cheston and your husband?” he asked, after some considerable pause, during which he had recalled his school memories, and especially his going away with Lena when they were both children.

“Well, you see it was this way,” Mrs. Behrens answered, with all the bitterness of a jealous woman; “she was said to be one of the prettiest girls in Calcutta when she first came here, though I could never see it myself. She always seemed to me like a washed-out sort of doll. But it was perfectly absurd the way fellows raved about her dark hair and eyes. Why, when I was her age she couldn’t have held a candle to me.”

“But this is not telling what passed between her and your husband,” Isaac remarked, not wishing to hear what Mrs. Behrens was like when a girl. “Well, Behrens, you see, who was executor or something to her uncle, was just the same as all the rest of the fools, his head got turned, and as Samuel has an idea that his money will buy any woman in creation, he commenced to send presents to this chit, and to write to her.”

"Did she accept his presents?"

"No."

"And did she answer his letters?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then how did she give him encouragement?"

"I don't know; but you mustn't tell me that a man can keep writing to a girl unless he gets some encouragement," Mrs. Behrens answered, with the true inconsistency of that type of woman she represented.

"I should be very much disposed to say that you are doing Miss Cheston a wrong," Isaac said, with a display of warmth.

"Oh, there you are, of course. Just like all your sex," cried the irate Jewess, as she tossed her head, and the motion caused her diamonds to flash like drops of crystal water in the moonlight. "Because the chit has got a doll's face, I suppose you think she couldn't do wrong. Oh no, certainly not," she sneered; "it's only your ugly women who are such sinners."

"Then that accounts for you not being a sinner," he returned, wishing to propitiate her.

"Fie, you naughty boy; you are flattering me," she said, with a pleased smile, as she tapped him playfully with her fan.

"How long has Miss Cheston been here?" he asked, seeing that the woman's vanity had overcome her jealousy, and she was in her usual good spirits again.

"Well, let me see, I should say about four years."

"Did she come out as a governess?"

"No; she had an uncle who was in the Custom-house."

"Ah, I remember; she used to speak of an uncle in India, and say that some day she hoped to go to him."

"Well, you see, she came. Old Cheston had been in the Customs for about thirty years, and it used to be said that he had saved money, and that the girl would get it."

"Had he no children, then?"

"No. They all died young."

"I presume that he's dead from the way you speak."

"Yes; he died in less than a year after his niece came. He had been to some masonic festival; got drunk as usual, and fell down dead in the street."

"Did he leave Lena any money?"

"Not a pice. He hadn't as many rupees as would have paid for his coffin. The Custom-house people raised the money to bury him."

"It was an unfortunate thing for Miss Cheston," Isaac remarked, feelingly.

"I'm not so sure of that," Mrs. Behrens answered, with another contemptuous toss of the head. The General's wife took pity on her and engaged her as a governess. She has a much better home than old Cheston could ever have given her."

The brief Indian twilight had faded away, and in the deep-purple heavens flashed the glittering stars. And Isaac found himself leaning back on the cushions of the carriage star-gazing and dreaming of long years ago, when he had vowed a boyish vow to be always true to Lena. "What a funny thing," he thought, "that we should both come to Calcutta! I wonder if she ever thinks of me. Poor Lena. I don't think I was as kind to her after I left school as I ought to have been."

Whenever Isaac drove out with Mrs. Behrens he always went back for dinner, and he went as usual on this evening.

"What do you think, Sam," exclaimed Mrs. Behrens suddenly to her husband, as the soup was being cleared away, "young Luck and that flame of yours were at school together."

"What flame of mine?"

"Have you so many that you don't know which one I mean?"

"According to what you say, my dear, I must have many dozens."

"Perhaps you have," retorted his wife, with the spiteful little snarl that was peculiar with her when she was annoyed. "Well, I mean that chit, old Cheston's niece."

"What! Lena Cheston? Well, that's very singular," said Behrens, looking at Isaac, and then, as if he was not desirous of continuing that subject of conversation, he gave some orders about the wine to one of the kitmurghars, and so Lena was not mentioned again then. Later on, however, as he and Isaac sat on the verandah smoking their cigars, he said, musingly, as he lay back in the lounge chair, while a coolie fanned him with a long-handled palm leaf fan,

"So you and Lena Cheston were at school together. Well, that's very remarkable."

"Yes, it's strange we should meet at a place like this, so far from home."

"Did you speak to her?"—this quickly.

"No."

"Then she doesn't know you are here?"

"No."

"How long is it since you saw her?"

"About eight years, I should think."

"So long as that. And yet you recognised her?"

"Yes. I should have known the face amongst a thousand."

"She's an awfully pretty girl, isn't she?"

"Yes," said Isaac a little sharply, remembering what Mrs. Behrens had told him; though why on earth he should feel jealous about a young woman whom he had not seen for eight years, and upon whom he had no claim, was one of those inconsistencies common enough under such circumstances, but not easily explained. After some silence, during which he smoked furiously and stared up at the stars, he remarked, "Your wife tells me that there was some flirtation between you and Miss Cheston?"

"Pshaw! my wife's a fool," answered Behrens, snappishly. "There was nothing of the kind."

"Then what made Mrs. Behrens jealous?"

"What makes any woman jealous? Her own idiocy. I knew old Cheston well, poor old chap. We were very intimate. And I was quite aware that he had no money. I was sorry for Lena, and sent her some money, but she sent it back. There, that's the only cause my old woman had for jealousy; but of course she magnified it, as women do, into all sorts of things. And if an angel from heaven were to come down now and tell her there was nothing, she wouldn't believe it."

"No, I should think not," Isaac remarked, ironically. As a matter of fact, however, he was far more disposed to believe the husband than the wife. For remembering Lena as he had known her in those happy years that seemed to him now so far away, when she was a sweet, ingenuous, simple child, he could not imagine her having anything to do with such a man as Behrens.

Mr. Behrens seemed to have dismissed the subject of conversation from his mind with that last remark of his, and placing his

half-smoked cigar on the little round table that stood between him and his guest, he gave himself up to his "forty winks" that he generally liked to take after his dinner.

Isaac sank back in his chair and gazed again up to those burning stars that made the Indian night so magnificent. The air was languid with a thousand perfumes, and musical with the buzz and whirr of myriads of night insects. Somewhere, not far off, some natives were singing a low, plaintive song, accompanying it with the melancholy beat of the tom-tom, and the foliage all around was gemmed with the quivering lights of the fire-flies.

Isaac found himself dreaming of Lena, and following back the threads of his own life—a life not very eventful as yet, but rather solitary. And the magic of the hour, or something else, led him to ask himself who he was. Who and what were his parents? How was it he had never heard anything of them? And how was it that no living soul had ever claimed relationship with him? It seemed pretty certain, he thought, that from reasons which he could not possibly guess at those who ought to have owned him had abandoned him, and he was a mere waif dependent on the charity of an eccentric old man. This was hardly fair to Mr. Greth, but somehow Isaac had never been able to take any other view of Mr. Greth's kindness. Although he knew that Mr. Greth had taken him into the firm, taught him the business, and virtually brought him up, he felt no gratitude. On the contrary, he was inclined towards a dislike for the head of the firm, and yet he had no substantial, if any, grounds at all for disliking him. Similar thoughts to these often occupied the young man's mind, but on this particular occasion they were accentuated, as it were, by the curious coincidence of finding himself after many years in the same town with his childhood's sweetheart, and that town thousands of miles away from where they last saw each other. And then what he had heard about her friendless state could hardly fail to remind him of his own, which had so many points of resemblance. He and this young woman had passed their early years in each other's company, and now after a long lapse of time they were thrown together on a foreign shore by the accident of chance.

"Hullo, I declare I've been dozing," exclaimed Mr. Behrens, jerking himself up with a start, and looking as if he wanted to

make believe that it was an unusual thing for him to so doze. Then he stood up, yawned, stretched himself, and as he proceeded to light another cigar he said,

"I say, dear boy, it's curious you meeting Miss Cheston, isn't it?"

"Yes, very curious."

"I suppose you'll go and see her?"

"Certainly I shall, for auld lang syne's sake."

Mr. Behrens' face displayed a feeling of annoyance, but he spoke very affably and pleasant as he asked,

"Did I understand you to say that you and she were school-mates?"

"Yes, and we were sweethearts too at one time. When I was quite a little fellow I ran away with her."

"Lor', you don't say," exclaimed Mr. Behrens, with a loud laugh; "what an extraordinary thing! Well, now, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you made up to her again and married her."

Then, laying his finger on his nose in an artful way, he added in a confidential tone, "But look here, old chap, if I might be allowed to give you a word of advice it is this, don't marry any girl unless there's money. Love's all bosh. Money is the great thing. Come, I'll run you down in the buggy as far as Spence's for a turn at billiards—what do you say?"

Isaac was not disinclined for a little excitement, and so, gladly accepted the offer; but somehow he felt rather annoyed by what Behrens had said, though he was careful to keep this annoyance to himself. The sentiment of his youth was not quite killed, and he did not like to think that love *was* all bosh. When, a few hours later, he went home to his lodgings not quite as sober as a judge, he found a letter for him from Bombay. It was in Mr. Tremaine's handwriting, and the following was the principal part of it:—

"I am instructed by Mr. Isaac Greth to tell you that you are to remain in Calcutta until further orders, and you will be required to personally superintend the loading and unloading of all our vessels. All the arrangements for carrying out these important matters will be left in your hands, as Mr. Greth is particularly desirous of letting you see that he reposes trust in you of no ordinary kind. At the same time, you will please to bear in mind that the position in which you are now placed is one of considerable responsibility,

and that it is of the highest importance that you jealously guard the reputation and interests of the firm. All contracts made by you for lumber, stowing, ballast, hiring of lighters, and other matters necessary for the carrying out of the work will be ratified by the firm, subject to the approval and supervision of Brown and Carter, our Calcutta agents. Finally, I am to tell you that your new appointment carries with it an increase of salary at the rate of three hundred rupees a year."

Isaac read this letter with considerable satisfaction, excepting the part dealing with his salary. There he turned up his nose and muttered,

"Just like old Greth's meanness. Three hundred rupees a year! Why, it's not worth having. He might just as well have made it fifty pounds."

Then he tumbled into bed with his mind all in a whirl, but with a central figure standing out very clear and well-defined, and that figure—Lena Cheston.

CHAPTER XIV

“AND HOW YOU CALLED ME YOUR LITTLE WIFE.”

IT happened that the next morning as Isaac was going down to the Ghat where his ship was lying, the very first person he met whom he knew was Mr. Samuel Behrens, who was driving rapidly along in his buggy, but pulled up when he saw Isaac. This gentleman, although habitually a late bird, was an early riser, for he was always on the look-out for the main chance, and he was fond of saying that it was the early bird that picked up the worm. His favourite adage was to receive verification this morning.

Isaac communicated to Mr. Behrens the substance of the letter he had received from Bombay. The Jew brightened up, and his small eyes glistened, as, slapping the young man heartily on the back, he exclaimed,

“I congratulate you, old fellow. Now, look here, you must do a turn for me. Get me the firm’s business again. You could do that. Give me a contract for supplying dunnage and lighters. I can do that sort of thing better than any man in Calcutta, and I’ve got the best lighters on the Hooghly.”

Isaac was very anxious to serve his friend, who had treated him very liberally, so he said,

“I should be glad to give the contracts to you, but all my arrangements are subject to the approval of Brown & Carter, and I should have to submit the proposal to them.”

“Then the matter’s settled,” cried Behrens, “and we’ll go and wet it in a bottle of Spence’s Clicquot. I can work Brown & Carter. I bring too much grist to them for them to oppose me.”

The bottle of Clicquot was duly discussed, and later on in the day Isaac told one of the principals of Brown & Carter’s firm, who was on board, that he wished to give the contract for dunnage and lightering to Mr. Behrens. The principal showed some objection,

saying that Behrens had already had the firm's business in his hands, but had lost it through sharp practice. Isaac, however, pressed his point, and subsequently carried it, much to Behrens' delight.

It was not until three or four days after this that Isaac was able to put into execution the resolve he had made to go and see Miss Cheston.

Mrs. Gascoigne, the lady with whom she was staying, occupied a small bungalow at Gardenreach, and thither Isaac made his way one afternoon. He was shown into a small waiting-room, and after some delay Miss Cheston appeared.

She had developed into a fine, handsome young woman, but the features were the same; and save that she looked older, and was plumper and more womanly, she did not appear to be very greatly altered from the Lena of eight years before. She was very plainly but very neatly dressed in a closely-fitting brown dress, with white collar and cuffs. Her dark hair was plaited in a thick coil, surmounted with a tortoiseshell comb. When she spoke, Isaac recognised the voice instantly; save that it was strengthened, its tones were the same.

"I understand you wish to see me, sir," she said, but giving no indication that she recognised who her visitor was, nor was she likely to know him. He had changed infinitely more than she had, and a slight beard and moustache made recognition almost impossible. Although she was two years older than he was, he looked the elder by three or four years. The Indian climate and dissipation together had produced a faded, tired appearance, and he might have passed for twenty or even more.

"Yes, I called on purpose to see you," he answered, with a smile. "Do I not remind you of someone whom you have seen before?"

She looked at him fixedly for a few moments, and then said,

"No, sir; you seem to be an utter stranger to me."

"Indeed! Then, I must have altered wonderfully. I am an old schoolfellow of yours."

"You are?" in surprise.

"Yes."

"It must be a very long time ago, then," she remarked, somewhat incredulously.

"Well, not yet half a century," he answered, laughingly. "I may even tell you something more. I was once a sweetheart of yours."

She stared at him in amazement for a moment or two, and then,

"You don't mean to say you are Isaac Luck?"

"I do mean to say so."

With a little cry of delight she put out both her hands, and there was much hearty shaking, and her pretty face was scarlet and her eyes bright as jewels.

"Well, I *am* astonished," she exclaimed. "Let me look at you again. Really, I cannot believe you are Isaac Luck. You *have* altered, Isaac; why, you've got a moustache and beard, and look quite a man."

"You didn't think I was going to remain a boy all my life, did you?" he asked. "Come, for the sake of the old times, I must kiss those pretty lips." And drawing her towards him he had his arm round her waist and had kissed her before she could stop him; not that she made any great effort to do so, but she cried, prettily,

"For shame of yourself, Isaac. I declare you are just as bad as ever, but I'll forgive you this once for the sake of the old times. But tell me, whatever are *you* doing here? Isaac had soon told her all he had to tell, and Lena listened attentively. When he had finished, she said, thoughtfully, "I remember quite well when Mr. Greth came to the school for you. I thought he was such a funny-looking man. And do you remember how you and I cried? Weren't we geese? And you told me you would always remember me, and write ever so often. But you only wrote me a few letters, you naughty, wicked boy. And then to think that after all these years we should meet so unexpectedly in Calcutta. Well, it is strange, and I can hardly believe it."

"It's true, nevertheless," Isaac remarked, as he looked at her with admiration. "But tell me now what have you been doing since we parted?"

"Well. I've had a few ups and downs," she replied, sadly. "But sit down, we can talk ever so much better. Oh, no; you needn't hold my hand, even if we are such old friends. You must remember we are man and woman now, and you must behave your-

self. Leave go, sir, directly, or, I declare, I'll get angry. There, that's it. Well, you know, I never had many relations that I knew; poor Uncle Joe, my father's brother, was, I think, the nearest. He was in the Custom-house here in Calcutta, and when I left school he got a lady, whom he knew and who was coming out, to bring me. Poor uncle, he was very kind; but he died in less than a year after I arrived. It was a great blow for me to be left here without a friend in the world. And when uncle died, it appeared, contrary to all expectations, that his affairs were so involved that there was hardly enough money to bury him with. I never could understand that, because he had a habit of saying to me, 'Well, Lena, I haven't much to leave you, but what few hundreds I have will keep you out of the workhouse at anyrate.'

"It was strange he should have said that if he knew he had nothing," Isaac remarked.

"Yes, very strange; because he wasn't a man to say or do anything rash, and I can never bring myself to think he didn't know exactly how he stood, for he was so careful and precise in everything he did."

"But did you not have his affairs looked into?"

"I had nothing to do with it; it was all arranged by a man of the name of Behrens."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; but I have my own opinions about that man. He said that uncle owed him a lot of money, and all that there was was not sufficient to pay his bill."

Isaac looked rather thoughtful and sage, but he made no remark, and Lena continued,

"If it had not been for the kindness of General Gascoigne's wife, I really don't know what I should have done. She came and offered to take me into her family as a sort of governess to her two little girls, but since her husband's death I've been more like a companion to her, and she never goes out now without taking me. So you see, after all, I've not much to complain about."

"Well, no, as long as you are happy and comfortable."

"I am both," cried Lena, with some enthusiasm. "Mrs. Gascoigne is the dearest woman in the world, and treats me more as if I were her daughter."

After a few moments' silence, Isaac asked,

"Do you know much about the Mr. Behrens you mentioned?"

"No. I know that he is a Jew, and he doesn't bear a very good character."

"Did he ever write to you?"

"Yes." And Lena looked at Isaac curiously and inquiringly. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I heard something about it."

A look of stern indignation came into Lena's face, and her eyes flashed angrily as she said,

"It's shameful that my name should be mentioned in the same breath as that man's. He had the impertinence to write several letters to me asking me to meet him. Every one of these letters I showed to Mrs. Gascoigne before I sent it back. He also had the audacity to send me some money, which I need scarcely say I likewise returned. Mrs. Gascoigne threatened at last to prosecute him for annoyance, and he got frightened, I suppose, and stopped. But tell me how did you hear of it?"

Isaac hesitated to answer the question, but Lena's bright, searching eyes were fixed upon him, and so he told the truth.

"I heard it from Mrs. Behrens herself."

Lena shuddered as she said,

"You know that dreadful woman, then?"

"Yes, slightly."

"I hope, for your own sake, Isaac, that it is but slightly," Lena remarked, with some warmth. "She is a dangerous, designing, wicked creature. I am sorry to say this about any woman, but it's too true as regards Mrs. Behrens."

"Well, Lena, my connection with these people is purely a business one," Isaac hastened to explain, and purposely avoiding going into details.

"I am glad it is only a business one," Lena returned, "though even in that capacity I should say, if all is true that one hears, that the less you have to do with them the better. Mr. Behrens is very much disliked by all respectable people, for they say that he does not deal fairly."

"And yet he seems to have a good connection and considerable influence," urged Isaac.

"Any man who has as much money as this one has, can have connections of a kind, and influence of a kind. A man who makes himself wealthy by lending to others at usurer's interest is not a respectable man ; at least not from my way of thinking."

"But he seems to have a pretty large business besides," Isaac said, keeping the subject up more for the sake of learning the truth about Behrens than for any other reason.

"I believe he does all sorts of things," Lena answered ; "but really I am so little interested in the man that I do not care to talk about him. I only know that he and his family are quite tabooed by all respectable people."

"Then suppose we talk about something else," said Isaac. "Yourself, for instance. We couldn't have a more delightful subject."

"Ah, so you say, but you must not try to make me believe that you really think so."

"Upon my word I do."

"Isaac, Isaac, be truthful," she cried, shaking her finger at him. "Do you think I have forgotten your vows ever so many years ago, and how easily you broke them ? Out of sight out of mind, you know."

"You refer, I suppose, to my not keeping up the correspondence ; but that was not my fault."

"Whose fault was it ?" she asked, with animation.

"Mr. Greth's."

"Isaac, I don't believe you."

"On my honour, it's true."

"Then Mr. Greth must have had some very good reason, and though I know nothing about him, I should advise you to do nothing that he does not wish you to do."

"Oh, bother Mr. Greth ; he is an old fool," cried Isaac, peevishly.

"For shame, Isaac. He is your employer, and you ought at least to respect him."

"I suppose I ought, but I don't," Isaac answered, curtly. "But I want to talk about you, Lena."

"What about me ?" she asked, with a sly glance at him.

"I want to know what you've been doing all these years. How many sweethearts you've had ?"

"Don't be rude, Isaac."

"That is not rudeness."

"Yes, it is."

"Do you mean to say you've had no sweethearts?"

"Of course I mean to say so."

"Really, Lena, I cannot believe that such a pretty girl as you are, can have passed eight years without somebody making love to you."

She blushed a deep scarlet to the very roots of her dark hair, and looking at him from under her long fringe-like lashes, she said,

"Do you suppose that a woman is as inconstant as a man?"

"I don't exactly understand that remark."

"Then you are obtuse," and she became interested in a book on the table.

"I will admit it; therefore enlighten me," he said.

She looked up from the book and at him, and then, dropping her eyes again, said in an undertone,

"Do you remember when you and I ran away from school?"

"Yes."

"And how you called me your little wife?"

"Yes."

"And vowed you would always be true and faithful?"

"Yes; but why this catechising?"

"Simply to freshen your memory. I wonder, Isaac, how many girls you have said the same things to since then."

"None."

"You wouldn't wish me to believe that?"

"Of course I would, because it is a fact. I may have flirted a little, but it has been in a very mild way. But do you mean to tell me that you have not ceased to think of me since we left school?"

"I mean to say that I have always looked back to you as the one companion of my childhood, from whom I derived any real happiness," she answered, somewhat evasively.

"But surely you did not intend to remain single all your life on that account?" he remarked.

"I scarcely know what my intentions have been. I have often wondered what had become of you, and if I should ever see you again."

"And you are glad to see me?"

"Yes, of course I am."

"Then there is no reason why we should not be sweethearts again?" he said.

She hung her head as she answered,

"That depends on several things."

"Name some of them."

"Well, one is whether you really care for me or not."

"I do care for you very much," he cried, as he attempted to take her hand, but she kept away from him.

"You must remember I am older than you," she said.

"What does that matter? It is only a difference of two years after all."

"But still a great difference when it is on the woman's side. Then another reason is I am very poor."

"What do I care for that?" he exclaimed, as he began to feel the influence of her presence and winsome manner. "I am young and can work, and I dare say some day I shall make money."

"Well, then, there is one more weighty reason," she replied. "Even if you seriously wished me to be your wife some day we should have to wait a long time."

"Why?" he asked, quickly.

"Because in about six months' time Mrs. Gascoigne is going home to England. She will travel about England for a year with her children, and is then going to Japan to join a married sister."

"But what difference will that make to you?"

"It will make all the difference imaginable, because I have promised not to leave her."

"But there are circumstances that would justify you breaking that promise."

"None, Isaac," Lena answered decisively. "Mrs. Gascoigne has been too good, and is too fond of me, for me to leave her unless she wished it."

"So am I fond of you," he cried; "and surely I have as much claim upon you as she has."

"Yes; but if you love me you will not object to wait."

"How long should I have to wait?"

"At least five years."

"Five years," he cried; "why, that's a lifetime."

At this point of the conversation the door was opened, and Mrs. Gascoigne entered, but seeing who was in the room she was withdrawing quickly, when Lena said,

"Mrs. Gascoigne, will you allow me to introduce to you an old playmate and schoolfellow of mine, Mr. Isaac Luck? When we were children we were even sweethearts together."

Mrs. Gascoigne was a tall, stately, very ladylike woman. She looked older than her years, for her hair was a little grey, and there were signs of grief in her face. She bowed stiffly, and seating herself on the edge of a chair, asked him a few commonplace questions, and at last said to Lena,

"I hope, my dear, that this young gentleman will excuse you, as I am waiting for you to accompany me in a drive."

Isaac felt piqued, and his vanity was insulted; but taking the hint, and as Mrs. Gascoigne did not seem inclined to leave Lena, he rose, and returning the lady's bow rather scornfully, he shook Lena's hand, and took his departure.

When he had gone, Mrs. Gascoigne, as she put her arm round Miss Cheston's waist as they went upstairs, said, in her staid way,

"Lena, my child, I do not think that young man is one whose acquaintance it is desirable you should cultivate."

"Why, Mrs. Gascoigne?" Lena asked, quickly, and looking up into her face.

"Well, my dear, it is not quite easy for me to give a good reason. There is something about him in his manner and appearance that I do not like. He looks dissipated."

"But I have known him ever since I was a little thing," Lena pleaded.

"That makes no difference. In fact, it may be a reason why you should avoid him now. At any rate, I do not like his face. It is a stupid prejudice possibly. But I am quick to judge people. Besides, dear, when you have serious intentions of getting married I should like to select the man who is to be your husband. And," she added, after a pause, "if you study my wishes I intend to make some provision for you that will secure your future from

any concern about money matters. Under any circumstances, I trust you will not ask Mr. Luck to come here again."

The lady's words made Lena feel a little unhappy. It seemed to her rather hard that she should be deprived of the company of her old schoolfellow, considering that they had met so strangely after so many years and so far from home. At the same time, she knew that Mrs. Gascoigne had been like a mother to her, and had taken her at a time when she was utterly friendless, and without means or home. Lena was of too grateful a nature to forget these things, and yet she could not all at once cut her feelings loose from her playfellow and child-sweetheart.

Later on as she drove as usual with Mrs. Gascoigne, that lady asked her many questions about Isaac, all of which she frankly answered, besides telling her how, when she was a child she had run away with him, and how for some time after leaving school he had written to her.

Mrs. Gascoigne listened very attentively and with evident interest, and when the story was finished she asked,

"And now having met the lover of your early years, when you have become a woman and he a man, do you think that the affection you bore him as a youth is likely to turn to love now that you are no longer children?"

"Yes, I think it would," Lena answered, shyly.

"And you believe that your happiness centres in this young man?"

"Yes; I do believe so."

"Very well, then; if you will promise to be guided by me in the matter I will see what I can do. I think the disparity in your ages is almost a fatal barrier, for I have the strongest possible objection to the wife being older than the husband. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it breeds unhappiness; but, notwithstanding this, I will make some inquiries about the young man. You say he has been in Bombay for some time, so I shall have no difficulty in finding out all about him. I know Mr. Tremaine, Greth Brothers' manager, very well, as my husband and I were stationed in Bombay for two years. If he reports favourably of this young Luck, and if, after serious reflection, you are desirous that he should pay his addresses to you, I shall throw no obstacle in your way,

but, on the contrary, will encourage him. I wish you, however, to remember that I take a great interest in you, and I am truly desirous of seeing you settled comfortably in life. I therefore hope most sincerely that you will not rush into a hasty marriage that will perhaps break your heart, and bring you unending sorrow."

"I promise you, Mrs. Gascoigne, that I will not do anything against your wishes," Lena said, with great earnestness.

"I am glad to hear you say so. Then, the first step you must take is to write a few lines to Mr. Luck, asking him not to come here again until you have obtained my permission for him to do so.

In giving effect to this wish of Mrs. Gascoigne's, later on in the evening, Lena found it by no means the easy task she anticipated. It seemed, somehow, as if she were trifling with her heart. It was so hard that in a foreign land she should be debarred from seeing her schoolmate with whom she had grown up. But still she had promised Mrs. Gascoigne, and so she made the wrench; and after many efforts to write something to her satisfaction, she decided on sending the following:—

"MY DEAREST ISAAC,—Do not think me unkind if I ask you not to call here again until I write and tell you when you can come, and not to attempt to hold any communication with me. It is better for both our sakes that you do not. It is not a very easy matter for me to have to make this request, but still I am convinced it is to our mutual interests. Will you, for my sake at least, if not for your own, respect it?—Ever affectionately yours,
LENA CHESTON."

As Isaac read this "chit" he was greatly enraged, not so much with Lena as with Mrs. Gascoigne, who, he felt, was the real author, and as he crushed the note into his pocket, he muttered,

"The old fool, she thinks to keep Lena from me, but I will circumvent her or eat my own head."

CHAPTER XV

“LIKE AN EVIL VOICE THAT SPEAKETH IN THE
DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT.”

THE revelation that Miss Cheston had made to Isaac as to the true character of Mr. Behrens did not affect Isaac to any appreciable degree; at any rate he gave no open indication that he thought the less of Behrens, for he told him nothing of what he had heard, nor did he discontinue his visits to the house of the wealthy Jew.

In dealing with a young man like Isaac Luck it is not an easy matter to so analyse all the delicate details of his character as to account for every act and deed of his life in a manner that is entirely satisfactory. After all, the human brain and will are of too complex a nature to be reduced to proportions either by logic or mathematics. We can only judge them in the concrete, and not in the abstract. A man may do an eminently good deed one month and the next an eminently bad one. Yet where is the rule that can properly gauge the cause of these two diametrically opposed effects? One thing, however, is universally admitted, and that is, that a person's life takes its tone and bent from the surroundings and influences of early youth. If, therefore, Isaac had been subjected to a somewhat more rigid discipline in his childhood, and had had the benefit of home influences, it is probable he would have taken a less cynical view of existence, and have attained to a higher moral standard. As it was now, he had developed a disposition of intense selfishness, and very readily assimilated his ideas to those of his companion. Of course, if he had been really in love with Lena Cheston, he would at once have severed all connections with the Behrens. But he was *not* in love with her. At this time he liked her, and liked her very much,

and thought how nice it would be to have her for his wife; but between the liking and the love of a man for a woman whom he wishes to wed there is a wide line of demarcation. Nor was it likely that young Luck would take kindly to the restrictions which married life imposes, nor subject himself to that discipline of mind and habits which is indispensable to a man who wishes to enjoy comfort and happiness in his family circle. Luck did not like anything that was at all humdrum. He had a yearning for excitement, and he sought to satisfy this yearning by the excitement which he found in public bars and billiard-rooms. The inordinate vanity of his youth led him to do what his elders did, and he aimed at being considered "a man about town," whatever that might mean. Certainly for him it did mean a good deal, because at this period it represented his ambition.

With these remarks to guide him, the reader will not find it a difficult matter to quite understand how it was that Isaac Luck did not at once proclaim his abhorrence and disgust for Samuel Behrens, after what he learned from Lena Cheston. Mr. Behrens had money, a fine house, servants, horses, carriages. He was essentially "a man about town." And he was the head and leader of a class that represented a Bohemianism of an offensive type, but still very attractive to a mind that was lacking in the cohesive qualities of staidness, order, and, for the want of a better word, we will say—gentility. Under Mr. Behrens' patronage Isaac enjoyed a state of things from which he would have been excluded otherwise; and which, however objectionable from a strictly moral point of view, were nevertheless fascinations to the undisciplined mind of a youth who could take no very ascetic view of life. Behrens was useful in many ways to Isaac. Not the least of these ways was that Isaac could always anticipate payment of his salary by drawing on Mr. Behrens, and it is hardly necessary to observe that owing to his recklessness Luck was frequently compelled to anticipate. Then, again, it was a great thing in his eyes to be privileged to ride in the luxurious carriage with the much-bediamonded and extravagantly-dressed Mrs. Behrens, whose vulgarity—if ever he really did think her vulgar—was amply compensated for by the magnificence of her get-up.

Isaac Luck therefore continued his amicable relations with these

people, and Mr. Behrens looking upon him as "a green young fool," through whose instrumentality he could bring more grist to his mill, continued to flatter his vanity and bestow his fulsome patronage upon him. Mr. Behrens, however, was never known to do a favour for anyone from purely generous motives. Generosity was a totally unknown quantity in his composition. He lived for himself and for no other human being; and whether he imagined or not that he was going to stretch out his existence for an indefinite period, his one aim, his one object, his one belief, creed, hope, wish, thought, was to add to his wealth, and in his own person enjoy the luxury that wealth could beget and the homage it could buy. It was a poor thing to live for, but men have made gold their god long before Mr. Behrens' time, and will continue to do so until the hoped-for millennium shall change man's nature.

As we have already said, the receipt of Miss Cheston's note by Isaac caused him great annoyance, and produced in him a feeling of very decided dislike for the lady who had a perfect right to constitute herself the young woman's guardian. But Isaac took quite another view of it. To him it seemed officiousness, which he was bound to resent; and he thought it was a pretty hard thing that he could not to be allowed to see his old schoolfellow just whenever he liked. He fancied, no doubt, that he had a sort of prescriptive right in her, and that for anyone to interfere with that right was something little short of an outrage that he was bound to take revenge for, and he determined there and then to endeavour to keep up the connection with Lena in order that he might "spite" Mrs. Gascoigne, if for no other reason.

His first preliminary to this step was a bold one, for, notwithstanding the note, he called at the lady's house and saw Lena again.

Miss Cheston did not greet him with any manifestation of either warmth or delight. She was frightened by his audacity, but at the same time she did wish that her friend and mistress had not imposed that restriction.

"Why don't you wish me to come and see you, Lena?" Isaac asked, in no very gentle mood; and referring to the note he had received.

"It is not I who don't wish to see you, Isaac," she returned,

tearfully, "but Mrs. Gascoigne thinks it is better that you should not come."

"And who is Mrs. Gascoigne, pray, that she should dictate to you?" exclaimed Isaac, with anger. "I knew you long before she did, and have more right to you."

"Perhaps you have, Isaac," said Lena, "but Mrs. Gascoigne is so kind that I feel I ought not to offend her."

"Bother Mrs. Gascoigne," Isaac exclaimed, with great irritability. "What right has she to keep us from each other. I should have thought, Lena, that you would have had more love for me than to do just what this person tells you."

"Isaac, you know that I am very fond of you," she answered, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, "but I cannot offend Mrs. Gascoigne. You don't know how kind and good she's been."

"I don't care how kind she's been, she has no right at all to dictate to you what you are to do. We are not school children now."

"No, Isaac," said Lena, very gently, as, drying her eyes, she took his hand and looked into his angry face, "we are not. But you forget how long it is since we met; and during all that time, excepting for a little while, you have never written to me, and perhaps never thought of me."

"I have thought of you," he answered, "and should have written to you if I had known where to have found you, but how could I write if I had no address?"

"It would not have been a difficult matter, dear," she said, very tenderly, "for you to have known where I was if you had not ceased to correspond with me when you did."

"Well, that was old Greth's fault. He made me give up writing," exclaimed Isaac.

"Then, if you obeyed him at that time, do you not think I ought to obey Mrs. Gascoigne now?" asked Lena.

"No. I see no similarity in the two cases. I was quite a boy then, but we are old enough to do as we like now."

Lena seemed very distressed. It was obvious that she was greatly influenced by Isaac's presence, and yet she recognised that she owed more than a duty to Mrs. Gascoigne.

"Do you really love me, Isaac?" she asked, plaintively.

"Yes. You know I do."

"Then why not come and see Mrs. Gascoigne, and ask her to allow us to meet?"

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the sort," cried Isaac, contemptuously. "Why should I ask her permission when she is no relation to you at all?"

"No, but she has been a friend."

"That may be, but she has no right to treat you like a child."

"She does not treat me like a child, Isaac," said Lena, showing some firmness. "I am quite sure that what she has done has been done with the very best of motives. She thinks it is better for us to wait a little before pledging ourselves to each other."

"To wait for how long?" he asked.

She was puzzled by the question, but made answer,

"Perhaps she thinks, dear, that we are too young yet."

"Too young for what?"

"To be lovers," she answered, shyly.

"Look here, Lena," he replied, and speaking in that authoritative way that he seemed to think he was privileged to use on account of having been her schoolmate. "Look here, Lena, it's all nonsense for you to talk like that. Do you wish to be a child all your life? You are old enough now to know your own mind, and no one has any business to dictate to you. We are both friendless, we are both in a strange land, and we have known each other since we were babies."

"Do not say we are friendless," she remarked, looking up into his face and allowing him to draw her towards him. "Mr. Greth has been a friend to you, and Mrs. Gascoigne has been like a mother to me."

"I don't know that I have much to be thankful to Mr. Greth for," he replied, surlily. "He has kept me pretty close to my work, and got as much out of me as he possibly could."

"Ah, Isaac, I am afraid you are not grateful," said Lena, softly.

"What have I to be grateful for?" He felt a little guilty as he asked this question, for he remembered how Mr. Greth had paid his debts for him in Bombay.

"If you do not know, dear, how can you expect me to tell you?" she said, as though she really thought he expected her to answer

the question. "But why should we talk about these matters now? I shall have to run away soon, or Mrs. Gascoigne will be coming to look for me. And you know I may not see you again for a very long time."

"Lena, do you really love me?" he cried, passionately.

"Yes. I have already told you so."

"And will you be my wife?"

"Some day, dear, perhaps, if you will only have a little patience."

"Some day is very indefinite," he answered; "and the little patience may mean waiting until we are a toothless old man and woman, that is, if we wait the pleasure of the she-dragon who guards you."

"You must not speak so disrespectfully of Mrs. Gascoigne," she answered, as she drew from him.

"Forgive me, Lena, darling. I do not want to hurt your feelings, but it makes me very angry when I think that this person, who is a comparative stranger to you, should want to keep you from me. Do you love me enough to wish to be my wife?"

"I do, Isaac," she answered, with great tenderness.

"Then why should we wait Mrs. Gascoigne's pleasure? When we were children we always said we would be husband and wife. The time has now come."

"No, love, not quite. We must not be impetuous and rash. Wait a little for my sake."

"How long shall I wait?" he asked, decisively.

She was much troubled, because she was struggling desperately between her love for this man and a sense of duty, or what she considered a duty, to Mrs. Gascoigne. She could not be blamed if love blinded her a little, and being so blind she did not clearly see the wisdom of the course the lady had proposed. Perhaps she did think it was a little arbitrary, if not harsh, on Mrs. Gascoigne's part to wish to keep her from the lover of her earliest years. What can she know against Isaac? Lena asked herself. After all, is it not a silly prejudice on her part? Thus Lena argued mentally, but could not bring herself to go against the expressed wish of Mrs. Gascoigne on the one hand, or to sacrifice her lover on the other. And so, not being able to come to any conclusion, she appealed to him again.

"O Isaac, I *do* wish you would come and see Mrs. Gascoigne once more and talk to her!"

"I can do nothing of the sort," he answered.

"I am sure," she continued, "that it would be very much to our advantage to do our courting with the sanction and approval of Mrs. Gascoigne. You don't know how kind she is; and then there is another thing, she is very rich, and I am quite certain from what she has said that she would behave very handsomely to me if I married according to her wishes."

This argument seemed to tell with Isaac. To his rather mercenary mind it was something that was not to be altogether ignored, and after a moment's reflection he said,

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Lena. I'll agree to see Mrs. Gascoigne at once if you will make me a promise."

"What is the promise, dear?"

"That in the event of her not giving her consent you will in spite of that see me whenever I like."

He had driven her into a corner, and placed her in a cruel position. She looked at him very reproachfully, and in a mute, appealing way. He was tempting her to her fate, and she knew it, and yet she could not help herself. She was a woman, and loved! Still through her troubled brain streamed a glimmer of hope—a hope that the lady might be led to give her consent.

"Suppose I go and see Mrs. Gascoigne at once," she said.

"Yes. But before you go you must give me the promise I want."

"Ah, Isaac dear, do not ask me to do anything wrong."

"There is nothing wrong in that, because I deny the right of Mrs. Gascoigne to keep us apart. If she were your mother, or even a relation, it would be different, but she is not. And so I want to know what business she has to dictate to you; and I'll tell you what we'll do, Lena—if she doesn't choose to give her consent, we'll be married immediately, if you like."

"We must wait a little time," Lena urged. "There is no such hurry as that necessary. We are both so very young yet. I will go at once and ask Mrs. Gascoigne to come and see you."

"Stay, Lena. You must make the promise I ask for."

She hung her head now, and blushed with conscious guilt, as she answered in scarcely audible tones—

"I promise you."

Then, without another word, she left the room.

Isaac did not feel very comfortable when alone, and he reflected on his position, and with his characteristic want of frankness he shrank from facing Mrs. Gascoigne, because he could not find that he had any fair argument to use against her. He knew perfectly well that he was not in a position to marry Lena yet, for he had no means. His extravagances lately had even led him into mortgaging his coming quarter's salary to Mr. Behrens, and to get married without anything at all was next to impossible. But still he was silly enough and quixotic enough to do many things that other young men would have hesitated to do; and mentally turning to Mr. Behrens, he felt that in a case of need he could get some money from him.

It will thus be seen that Isaac Luck was not troubled with many scruples. His undisciplined mind could not discern that in every relation of life it was necessary to have some regard for the feelings of others. His first thought and first aim were of and for himself, and he resented authority as impertinence. He liked to go his own way, whether that way led him to destruction or not.

Lena was absent such a long time that he got a little uneasy, as it occurred to him that, perhaps, she did not intend to come back again. This thought made him angry, and he seriously contemplated going away, although he had no intention of abandoning her. He would take some means of seeing her, he thought, and he had confidence enough in himself to believe that when he did see her he could influence her to his own way of thinking. But at last the door opened, and she entered in company with Mrs. Gascoigne.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WOMAN'S TRUST.

ISAAC rose and bowed as they entered. Mrs. Gascoigne returned his bow with a scarcely perceptible motion of the head, and then signed to him to sit down again.

"Miss Cheston has told me something of what has passed this afternoon," she said, in a frigid sort of way. "I must preface what I have to say, however, by remarking that you have been very imprudent, to use a very mild term, in coming here in spite of the request she made to you not to call."

"But, Mrs. Gascoigne—"

"Excuse me, sir. I would rather that you hear what I have got to say before you speak."

Isaac did not feel very comfortable, and was rather disposed to blurt out what was then in his mind; for Mrs. Gascoigne's interference did not at all accord with his views. He managed, however, to restrain giving vent to his thoughts. Somehow that quiet, staid, sad-looking face rather awed him, while there was something in the reserved, dignified bearing of the lady that commanded respect.

"I have learned from Lena," she went on, "that you and she were playmates and schoolfellows together, in time gone by. I am prepared to admit that that fact may justify you to some extent in thinking that you have a right to the privileges of friendship; though, after all, those privileges must be dependent upon certain things. You are no longer children, and it is therefore necessary that you should recognise the laws which govern the conduct of honest and respectable men and women."

"I am not aware yet that I have broken any of those laws, Mrs. Gascoigne," Isaac remarked, feeling that he must say something.

"I may tell you," she went on, without noticing his remark, "that I have constituted myself the guardian of this young woman. She

came to me at a time when she was friendless, and since then I have come to think that I have a perfect right to control and influence her actions with something like parental authority. I have up to the present zealously guarded her happiness and interests, and I should like to ensure that nothing should jeopardise them in future. It was this feeling that prompted me to wish that, for a time at least, you should not see her."

"But why should there be any delay?" he queried, sharply.

"I presume, sir," she asked with great severity, "that you desire this young woman to be your wife?"

"Certainly, I do."

"Very well, then. It will be as well for you to remember that marriage is a very serious step in life, because it makes or utterly destroys the happiness of two persons. It occurs to me, therefore, that although you may have known Miss Cheston as a child, you want to know something of her as a woman before so important a step as marriage can be contemplated. You have been separated from each other long enough to become strangers again, and this was my view when I requested her to tell you not to call."

"I should like you to tell me, Mrs. Gascoigne, how you think we are to know each other if you do not allow us to meet?" he asked, growing a little bolder.

"I do not think you *can* know each other *unless* you meet," she answered, with emphasis, "but I would remind you that it is customary among polite people for a young man wishing to pay his addresses to a respectable young woman to come with some credentials. May I ask what your credentials are?"

Isaac felt as if he would like to say something very cutting and rude to this lady, whose searching glances begot in him a great deal of uneasiness. But he was perfectly well aware that he was no match for her, and her dignified bearing and commanding manner forbade him to be rude. He looked at Lena as though he hoped to draw some encouragement from her, but she was sitting near Mrs. Gascoigne with her hands folded on her knees and her head bent down. So he had to rely upon himself, but that reliance only enabled him to say with some acidity--

"I am in the employ of Greth Brothers, the shipowners."

"That fact I was already acquainted with," the lady returned.

"I am also aware of the world-wide fame and the sterling respectability of the house in whose employment you have the honour to be. I use the word *honour* with a full regard for its meaning, for I should think any young man may deem it an honour to serve under the flag of Greth Brothers. The fact that you are so employed by them is to some extent—I may even say a large extent—a guarantee of your own respectability, for I am informed that the firm is very particular indeed about its servants. It so happens, however, that I have learnt within the last few days that you are a constant visitor at the house of some people named Behrens, and that you are in the habit of going to places with Mr. Behrens that a young man like you, having a due regard for his reputation, should never set foot inside of."

Isaac's face grew scarlet, and he felt an inward sense of rage against this quiet, stately lady, who was thus probing him before his old school companion. He did not speak, however, although words trembled on his lips, but they refused to shape themselves into sound.

"It may be," Mrs. Gascoigne pursued, "that you are not fully aware of the reputation these people bear, though I cannot understand how it could be possible for you to be here many weeks before coming to the knowledge that Mr. Samuel Behrens is not a gentleman at all likely to add to a young man's lustre."

Isaac could hold his tongue no longer, and with his characteristic indiscretion, he said, sneeringly,

"I know nothing against Mr. Behrens, and have never *heard* anything. I suppose, though, that certain people feel prejudice against him because he happens to be a Jew!"

It was a most unfortunate remark on Isaac's part, and if anything could have served to lower him most thoroughly in the eyes of Mrs. Gascoigne it was this.

"Heaven forbid," she said, with a display of warmth, "that I should feel prejudice against any man on account of his religion. I care not whether a man be Jew or Gentile, Christian or Turk, so long as he be honest and, like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion. Your statement, however, that you have heard nothing against him hardly accords with strict truth. You will pardon me for plain speaking. Miss Cheston has already informed me that she made you acquainted

with the dastardly conduct of Mr. Behrens towards herself. And it remains for me to say that, had I been a young man, and had heard such a thing in connection with the woman I was anxious to make my wife, there would have been some very severe horse-whipping."

This was a sort of knock-down blow to Isaac, and he felt himself, so to speak, put out of court. And yet, in his desperateness, he made an effort, and did succeed in scoring a point in his favour, by remarking with considerable warmth,

"You forget, Mrs. Gascoigne, that, holding the position I do, it is not my place to quarrel with Mr. Behrens. If I made myself conspicuous here by that sort of thing, I should in all probability lose my situation."

"Well, I confess there is something in your argument," she returned, "and I'm willing to accede that much to you. I will also make every allowance for your youth; and not to prolong an interview that is not very pleasant to either of us, I will say this, that if you are honestly desirous of paying your addresses to Miss Cheston with a view to her becoming your wife at a suitable time, and when you are capable of keeping a wife, and I find after inquiry that your character is beyond doubt, I will give you every opportunity and every encouragement. In the meantime, however, you must respect my wishes; and as this is my house I must forbid you, under any circumstances, to come here again without my permission."

She rose, as a signal that the interview had ended, and put her arm through Lena's, as if to lead her from the room. But Isaac, who was burning with rage and a sense of defeat, said,

"Lena, before you go, I beg of you to let me say a few words to you alone."

Miss Cheston turned in great distress to her patroness, and said,

"O Mrs. Gascoigne! what am I to do?"

The lady released her arm, and in her cold, dignified manner answered,

"Whatever you think is right, my dear."

"Do let me speak to him," the girl pleaded, between her sobs.

"Certainly, if you wish," said Mrs. Gascoigne. "My duty is ended. Your fate is in your own hands. I will leave you, then."

Without so much as bowing now, she went out of the room, and then, covering her face with her hands, Lena stood there and wept.

"I knew perfectly well how it would be," Isaac exclaimed; "and I must now remind you of your promise."

Notwithstanding that he was now determined to have her if possible, he did not feel very amiable towards her, for he thought she was a fool for having told Mrs. Gascoigne everything, as she had done.

"O Isaac, Isaac! what am I to do?" the poor girl cried, in great distress of mind.

"You are not to be guided by whatever this woman tells you," he answered, scornfully.

"But you forget how good she has been to me."

"And what if she has been good to you, are you to ignore what you and I have always been to each other?"

"Ah, dear, don't be cruel," she murmured, looking up through her tears; "but let us do as Mrs. Gascoigne wishes. I am sure quite sure, you will lose nothing by it."

"If you call yourself nothing, you are right," he returned, contemptuously, "because this person has made up her mind that I am not to have you, and she won't stop at anything to accomplish what she wants. Now, then, I ask you one question, do you wish me to go from you and never see you any more?"

"No, Isaac, indeed I do not. I am willing to believe anything you tell me, because I trust and love you; but do not ask me to do anything that will offend Mrs. Gascoigne."

"If you love me you cannot study Mrs. Gascoigne," he said; "and if you love me you will keep your promise to see me."

"Isaac, I *do* love you," she murmured, as she let her head sink upon his breast.

"Then if you do, you will arrange to see me."

"I will, if you wish it; but if I do wrong may God forgive me," she sobbed.

"Come, my darling, don't fret like that," he said, tenderly.

"You will not do wrong. We have a perfect right to see each other in spite of everyone."

"Perhaps that is so, Isaac, but Mrs. Gascoigne is the only friend I have in the wide world, and I have no right to offend her."

"But there is no reason that she should know anything at all about it."

"No, not if I like to deceive her; but I have such a horror of deceit," she answered, with a shudder.

"In an affair of this kind some deceit is justifiable. Other young men and women have had to do it where unreasonable opposition has been offered to their wishes, and why shouldn't we?"

"It would be so much pleasanter if we could avoid it," she urged.

"Yes, perhaps it would; but as we can't avoid it, we must do the best we can. When shall I see you again?"

"I don't know, love. I must write and tell you," she replied, with a sigh of distress.

"Will you promise me solemnly that you will write?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then, I will wait till I hear from you; but will you write soon?"

"I will write the very first opportunity. In a few days, perhaps. But we must be very careful, for I am sure Mrs. Gascoigne would never forgive me if she thought I was not acting honestly to her."

"Don't let her know, then, that's all," he said. "Now, dear, good-bye."

She returned his warm embrace, and in another few moments he had left, and as he went he could not help smiling to himself as he thought that he had scored a triumph against Mrs. Gascoigne.

At the very instant that he was going out of the garden gate Mr Samuel Behrens was driving along the road in his buggy. He caught sight of Isaac and pulled up, exclaiming,

"Hullo, dear boy, this looks suspicious. Why, my well-loved friend Mrs. Gascoigne lives here. Here, jump up, if you're going to town. I've been down below the Reach to board one of Wilson's liners, the *Sea Foam*. She's stranded on the two fathom bank, and I've got the job to take the cargo out of her. But look here, my young friend, it's very suspicious to see you hanging about old Mother Gascoigne's premises, you know. What does it mean?"

In this vulgarly familiar way Mr. Behrens lisped out his speech, as he drove rapidly along the dusty road that crossed the Maidan to Calcutta.

Isaac hesitated how to answer, but after some reflection he said, "Well, I've been to see Miss Cheston."

"You sly dog. I guessed as much," cried Behrens, digging him in the ribs with his elbow. "But, I say, you must mind the old woman; she's a perfect devil when she likes. What do you say if we go into the canteen and have a drink?"

He pulled up as he spoke at one of the entrances to the great Fort William, which stands on the Maidan, and not only absolutely commands the river, but many miles of the country round about. As Isaac said nothing against the suggestion, the two men jumped down.

"Here, you beast, take hold of the horse's head and keep the flies off," cried Mr. Behrens in Hindustani to his syce.*

As the two men discussed their drink at the bar of the canteen in the fort, Mr. Behrens said insinuatingly, as he watched his companion from under his drooping eyelids,

"What's your game, dear boy, with Miss Cheston, eh? Have you anything serious on?"

"Yes," was Isaac's monosyllabic answer.

"Ah, you're a lucky dog. She's a deuced pretty girl!" and Mr. Behrens drained his brandy pawnee. "But does old Mother Gascoigne know of it?"

"Yes."

"And approves?"

"No."

"I expected as much. She is sure to put every opposition in your way."

He had spoken up to this point in an airy, jaunty sort of manner, but now his face suddenly grew sinister as between his teeth he muttered, "Damn her; I should like to bring that woman down a peg or two."

"So should I," said Isaac.

The sinister expression faded out of the Hebrew's face, and laughing heartily he ordered two more brandy pawnee, and then turning to the silly youth at his side remarked,

* In India a servant called a *syce* always rides on the small step at the back of a buggy. His duty is to hold the horse during stoppages, and keep the flies and other insects away by waving a fan about.

"Why don't you do it, then? Look here, dear boy, if I can be of any use to you, you've only got to say so, you know. Sammy Behrens is your man if you want any help."

"You are very kind," Isaac returned, feeling flattered by his friend's condescension. "I do not exactly know how you can help me, but perhaps I shall ask you to fulfil your promise some day."

"Well, say the word," answered Mr. Behrens, with a malicious twinkle in his small eyes. "When I like a man I'll do any mortal thing to serve him."

Mr. Behrens might have added here, that up to that moment the only man that he had ever liked was himself, and he had done very much indeed to serve that one.

"What are you going to do this evening?" he asked of Isaac.

"I've nothing particular to do."

"Well, then, you had better come home and take pot luck with me."

A few hours later on Isaac and Behrens sat in their accustomed place on the verandah, sipping their brandy pawnee and smoking their cigars. Mr. Behrens called out to his wife, who was trying to reduce the temperature of her huge body a few degrees by means of a coolie on each side of her vigorously plying a palm leaf fan,

"I say, old girl, what do you think? our young friend here is making up to pretty little Lena Cheston. I actually caught him in the very act of leaving dear old Mrs. Gascoigne's house to-day."

"Well, I'm very glad to hear that he is," the good lady remarked, with great animation; and she really was glad, but not on Isaac's account. She hated Lena for no other reason than that she believed her husband still hankered after her; and jealousy with such a woman as she was was an absolute disease. The idea had become firmly rooted in her mind, and nothing could eradicate it, that the poor girl had given Behrens encouragement. He was quite right for once when he said that if an angel from heaven were to come down and tell Mrs. Behrens that there had been no love passages between her husband and Miss Cheston, she would not have believed it. She knew that Lena was pretty, and she also knew her own husband was fascinated by every pretty face he saw. Therefore it is not unlikely that, if she could so have

willed it, she would have ordained that every woman whom her husband was ever likely to see should be as ugly as a toad. Very naturally she thought that if Luck was courting Miss Cheston she could relieve her mind of anxiety on her husband's account, because Luck himself would closely guard his own sweetheart. On his part Mr. Behrens was glad also, but for totally different motives to those that gave his wife pleasure. In his heart he entertained a feeling of intense bitterness against the unfortunate Lena on no more sufficient ground than that she had treated him with deserved scorn. He had some sort of notion, and not a very shadowy one either, that as a man he was a very attractive one, and that his natural attraction and his wealth together ought to be quite sufficient to captivate any woman and make her his bond slave. He appraised every woman at a money value, and when he found himself mistaken he became filled with spleen and malice. And Mr. Behrens knew no charity, neither had he forgiveness in his heart. To wound his vanity, his self-love, his exalted notions of his own importance, was to render yourself his deadly enemy; and as an enemy Mr. Behrens was treacherous, crafty, and cunning, and could not be met and fought with in the open as other enemies might. It occurred to him, therefore, that if Lena became the wife of Isaac he might yet be able to make her understand that he was not to be snubbed with impunity by such a nameless and friendless girl as she was. It was a paltry, unmanly, cruel feeling; but then Mr. Samuel Behrens' character was essentially paltry, unmanly, and cruel.

A second reason that caused him to be glad was that if Mrs. Gascoigne did not approve of the match, and according to Isaac she did not, a blow could be struck at her, and there was nothing he would have liked better than, as he expressed it, to "take that woman down a peg or two."

It happened that some friends called on Mr. Behrens at this moment, and he went into the house to see them, so that Isaac and Mrs. Behrens were left on the verandah alone, and, taking advantage of this circumstance, she asked,

"Is it true, Isaac, what Samuel says?"

"Do you mean with reference to Miss Cheston?"

"Yes."

"Oh, yes; it's quite true."

"Does Mrs. Gascoigne know of it?"

"Yes."

"How do you get on with her, then?"

"Not at all well. She talks about my waiting, and about inquiring into my character, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh yes; she's a mighty fine stuck-up sort of creature, she is," Mrs. Behrens exclaimed, with a bitter sneer, and arousing herself from the languid interest she had hitherto displayed. "Well, does the girl like you, that's the thing?" she asked, as she raised her great bulk into an upright position.

"There's no doubt about that."

"Good. Then you have her in spite of fifty Mrs. Gascoignes. And you'll have to do it quickly, too, because she's going to take Lena to England shortly. And look here, if you want a place to do your spooning in, bring her here and do it. You shall have the use of my house as much as you like."

Mrs. Behrens sank back again with a groan, as the exertion and sultriness of the night caused her to ooze at every pore. But she experienced a sense of the very keenest satisfaction, as her designing mind saw how she could secretly promote this match, which she would do, not because she cared one single jot for Lena, or, for the matter of that, for Isaac, but because she thought that by so doing she could assure herself that one temptation at least was placed out of her husband's way.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN LOVE'S STRONG CHAIN.

FOR some days Isaac waited, not with patience by any means, but in a restless state of expectancy for some communication from Lena. The opposition that he had met with from Mrs. Gascoigne had only served as an incentive for him to do everything in his power to take Miss Cheston from under the protection of this good lady. He could not see anything philanthropic or kindly in her motives, and the authority she was exerting, or trying to exert, was, in his sight, a piece of assumption that was to be very vigorously combated and put down.

Nor was he the only person who displayed interest in the matter. Mrs. Behrens discussed the question in a very lively way, and exhibited what might also be described as nervous anxiety lest anything should occur to prevent the two young people coming together. In the littleness of her existence, and the narrow range of her mental vision, the making of a match of this kind was a pleasure not to be foregone, and all the arts and wiles of her nature were brought into action ; for intrigue delighted her much, and for the intrigue's sake she was prepared to do almost anything.

Just as Isaac's patience had reached its limit, and he had resolved on taking counsel with Mrs. Behrens and asking that lady what course he should pursue, a letter came from Lena, of which the subjoined is a transcript :—

“GARDEN REACH.

“MY OWN DEAR ISAAC,—The past few days have been to me as a nightmare, and my mind has been greatly troubled. After you went away the other day Mrs. Gascoigne took me to task for remaining behind to speak to you. She was not angry, but seemed rather to be hurt. She talked to me long and earnestly, and

seriously, and pointed out that if I insisted on keeping up my connection with you no happiness could arise from our union, because ill-luck was invariably the result of wilful disobedience. O Isaac! you don't know how distressed I am. After what Mrs. Gascoigne said I quite made up my mind not to write to you, or have anything more to do with you, for the present at least; but that determination caused me so much agony that I felt as if my heart would break. I could not sleep at night, and I did nothing but cry all day.

"How is it, my dear Isaac, that Mrs. Gascoigne is so prejudiced against you? She is such a good woman; so kind, so unselfish, so anxious for the happiness of others that I dare not believe for a single moment that she would do anything that was wrong. I am sure, therefore, my darling, you will not be angry with me if I ask you if there is anything that you have not told me, but which has come to Mrs. Gascoigne's ears, and made her so embittered against you; for really she is embittered, and I am convinced she would not be so without very good grounds. Do tell me, dear; for it would have to be something very, very dreadful to make me dislike you.

"Mrs. Gascoigne seemed to think that it was a very dreadful thing for you to be so intimate with the Behrens. But then, as I told her, Mr. Behrens is connected with shipping, and so are you; and I believe he has or had something to do with your firm, and so, of course, you could not afford, perhaps, to treat him coolly. I am not so stupid, Isaac, as not to understand that in business matters it is often very necessary to keep on friendly terms with people whom we may not like, but whom it would not be wise to offend. For my own part I certainly do think Mr. Behrens is a very dreadful man, and I am sure he did not act honestly in my poor uncle's affairs, while his conduct to me was disgraceful. Still he may not be so bad as people say, although, if you would allow me, dear, I would suggest that it would perhaps be better for you to have as little to do with him as possible. Mrs. Gascoigne told me, after you had gone the other day, that she had heard that you were very intimate indeed with Mr. Behrens, and that you were being led astray by him. I am quite sure, Isaac, that it is this that has made her feel so very angry with you. Can you not write to

her and contradict the report? It would make me so happy if I knew that she was friendly to you; and only think how nice it would be! You could come here often and see me, and we could go out for walks and drives together. As it is now, I shall have to practise so much deception if you keep me to my promise to see you. O Isaac! do try and propitiate Mrs. Gascoigne. Write and tell her that you had no intention to be rude to her the other day. Refer her to Mr. Tremaine in Bombay, or to Mr. Greth himself in Liverpool. I am sure that either of these gentlemen would speak well of you. I am certain, Isaac, that if you only think the matter well over you will come to see how terribly wrong we should be to deceive Mrs. Gascoigne; besides which, we could never feel comfortable, knowing that we were going against her wishes. Although, my dear, you may think that she is harsh now, you would not think so if you knew her as well as I do. She is really one of the best women that ever walked, and she is so very anxious for my perfect happiness.

"I have dwelt upon this subject because I desire so earnestly to remove an impression you seemed to have when you were here that she was not justified in interfering. But you must remember that I have no parents and no relations that I know of, and therefore Mrs. Gascoigne is all the more anxious about me.

"And now, dear, to come to the promise I gave you to see you clandestinely. You don't know how that has troubled me. If you did, I am convinced you would release me from it. For my sake, dear Isaac, as well as for your own, I pray you do nothing that you need be ashamed of. And then there is another danger to be considered; that is, if Mrs. Gascoigne discovered that I was deceiving her she would order me to leave her house. Then what would become of me? Oh, it is dreadful to think of! When a man loves a woman he should do all that he can to make her happy, but you will not make me happy if you lead me into deceiving the best friend I have in the world. In order that I may know what you decide to do I will give you permission to write to me in answer to this, but it will perhaps be safer to send the letter by a coolie, and tell him to be sure and ask for me, and to give the chit to no one else.

“Wishing you all the happiness possible, my own dear Isaac,
and with all my love, I am, your own
LENA.”

Isaac read this honest, womanly letter with very mingled feelings, feelings in which annoyance very largely predominated. The effect it produced upon him was exactly the reverse of what Lena had intended. She wanted to bring him to a state of mind that would enable him to respect Mrs. Gascoigne's wishes, and comply with her very fair demands. But her arguments totally failed in their object. He was incensed more than ever against the lady, because he saw very clearly the influence she had over Lena. And he was perfectly conscious that if Mrs. Gascoigne were to institute inquiries about him in Bombay, the report she would receive would not tend to mollify her in any way.

“I must strike the iron while it's hot,” he thought; “it won't do to let Lena be swayed too much by her.”

His answer therefore to her letter was as follows:—

“MY DEAREST LENA,—What I have to say in reply to your letter I must say personally. I will therefore be at the garden gate of your house to-morrow night, at half-past eight precisely. Be sure you are there.—Your devoted
ISAAC.”

Punctually at the hour he had appointed he was at the gate which led into the grounds surrounding Mrs. Gascoigne's pretty bungalow at Garden Reach. The night was hot and sultry, and a haze hung over the stars.

He waited for more than half an hour without seeing or hearing a human soul. The only sounds he did hear were the chirpings and buzzings of night insects, and the soft notes of a love-sick bulbul as she sang plaintively in the tufted crown of a cocoanut tree.

This waiting did not tend to put him in a very amiable mood. He thought that she did not intend to come, and he gave vent to his feelings in muttered language that was strangely out of place amidst all the beauties of the still tropical night. He was tempted to go up to the house, and would have done so had it not been for a fear of being ignominiously expelled. Mrs. Gascoigne had

emphatically forbidden him to call again, and as she had plenty of servants she had the means of teaching him to respect her orders.

To say that he was annoyed would but very mildly express the real state of his feelings. Some of the worst elements of his nature seemed to be stirred up, and he even reviled Lena because he considered that she had no business to allow herself to be so completely swayed by Mrs. Gascoigne. Had it only been possible for Lena to have learned by some occult means what the real workings of his mind were at that precise moment—and a pity indeed it was she could not have so learned—it is pretty certain she would have shrunk from him with as much horror as she would have done from one of the hooded cobras of the country. She was a pure-minded girl, guileless and frank, and she thought of her lover as every woman thinks of her lover, that though he might have faults they were nothing compared to his virtues.

Isaac's patience quite came to an end, and he was about to go away, when his ear caught the sounds of a light footstep upon the pathway. Not knowing but what it might be one of the servants he screened himself behind the trunk of a palm until the footsteps approached the gate, and he was then enabled to make out in the darkness the figure of a woman. He waited for some moments until he felt pretty sure that this woman was the one he wanted; then he called in low tones,

"Lena."

"Isaac," came the answer.

Thus assured, he stepped from his shelter and greeted her with a rough,

"Well, you are a nice one, I must say. Why, I've been waiting here for more than an hour."

"Ah, dear, don't be angry. It's not my fault."

"No, I suppose it's the fault of that she-devil who guards you."

"Isaac," she said in amazement, and in a tone that told him he had gone a little too far, "you forget yourself."

"Well, my dear, you must forgive me if I do," he said, in softened tones. "No wonder that I am not very amiable, having had to wait here all this time."

"I do forgive you, dear," she answered, "but you wound my

feelings very much when you use coarse language. I cannot believe it is my Isaac of those dear days so long ago, when he made a daisy crown, and called me his queen."

Her words and reproachful tone found the soft spot in his heart. He was not quite lost to every sense of shame yet. In a moment he had her in his arms and kissed her.

"I am very sorry, Lena, I spoke so sharply," he said, "but you know it's very trying to one's patience to be kept waiting so long."

"I know it is," she answered, "but when we are doing what is not right it is necessary to be cautious. Somehow or another the dinner was unusually long to-night, and then when it was over Mrs. Gascoigne asked me to go to her room for a little while as she had something to show me. I thought really I should never get away from her. As it is I have run great risk, and I dread to think what the consequences would be if it were known that I had come to meet you."

"I can't see why you should have such a dread of its being known," said Isaac.

"Have I not already told you, Isaac, that Mrs. Gascoigne would tell me to leave her house? She is so honest and so straightforward herself that she would never tolerate deceit in anyone under her roof if she knew of it."

"Well, and what if she did tell you to leave?" he asked, in an insinuating tone.

"What if she did!" Lena echoed. "You can surely guess what it would *mean* for me."

"What *would* it mean?"

"It would mean that I should be thrown upon the world homeless, friendless, and penniless, and I am sure you can hardly wish such a thing as that."

"No, certainly not. But I fail to see how you would be homeless and friendless when I am here."

"Isaac, let us be practical," she said. "Supposing I were to say that in spite of Mrs. Gascoigne's wish I will come to you, are you prepared to make me your wife at once?"

"Well, hardly at once," he stammered.

"Then why should you wish me to risk my position here by doing that which is very decidedly wrong?"

"Look here, Lena, as you have asked a practical question I will ask another," he said, with the air of a man who felt that he had been driven into a corner. "Do you want to give me up?"

"No, dear. But I want you to be reasonable, and to do what is right."

"What is your idea of being reasonable, and doing what is right?"

"I explained all that to you in my letter. I want you to satisfy Mrs. Gascoigne in her very reasonable requests."

"I'll see Mrs. Gascoigne hanged first," he exclaimed, irritably.

Lena shrank away as though he had stung her.

"Isaac, you frighten me when you speak so angrily, and it makes me think that perhaps after all it is better that we part now and for ever. If you lose your temper now in that way, what will it be when I am your wife?"

It was his turn to be alarmed now, as he saw he had not quite the firm grip over her that he thought; and so, entirely changing his tone and bearing, he said,

"Well, darling, I won't lose my temper again. But when Mrs. Gascoigne's name is mentioned it irritates me as a red shawl irritates a bull. It is not pleasant for me to think that you are so entirely under her sway."

"There you are wrong, dear," Lena returned, as she allowed his arms to encircle her again. "If I were entirely under her sway I should not now be here with you. It is my duty, though, to respect her hospitality and wishes, and I must continue to do that until you are in a position to take me."

Isaac felt very strongly indeed that he would like to take her there and then. For although he certainly was not a passionate lover, there can be little doubt that at this time he was really fond of her. But when he took a mental survey of his position and prospects he could not see his way clear to do it. His reckless extravagance had for the time being beggared his exchequer, and he had nothing whatever to fall back upon.

"I am quite sure of one thing, Lena," he answered, "I should be very much happier and very much better off if I had you to look after me." He spoke sincerely here—that is, he spoke what he honestly believed to be the truth, and it is not at all improbable

that he would have improved if she had become his wife at this time. Her gentle influence would have restrained him, for he was not yet so abandoned but he would have been amenable to reason, and would have recognised a wife's right to control him. Up to this time he had sinned no deeper than many thousands of youths. He had been a little fast and had run riot. But his follies *were* follies and not crimes. Many a young man has been pardoned by wife, brothers, sisters, father, and mother for infinitely worse things than could be laid to the charge of Isaac Luck, so far.

"If you think so, dear, then I am truly sorry I cannot look after you," she said.

"I am not very old," he continued, and there was something pathetic and touching in his tone and manner, "but I've known a good deal of bitterness. The only pleasant memory I've got is of our school days. I was then very happy with you. But since it has been a sort of devil-may-care life. I don't seem to have been like other young men at all. And the only childhood I ever had was that with you. I seem to be a waif entirely, and I haven't a living creature whom I can call a relation who has ever written me a letter or given me a word of advice."

"But you said that Mr. Greth had been very kind to you," Lena remarked, with an expression of great sympathy, as she twined her arms around his neck.

"Oh, yes, in a certain way he has; but somehow I never could like the old man. He is too much of a machine, and he thinks everyone else ought to be exactly like him. He is a sort of dried-up, animated old mummy, with not an atom of love for anybody or anything but his money."

"And yet, dear, he seems to have shown tender feeling for you," she remarked.

"I don't think he has. He saw that I did my work, and so he has stuck to me, but beyond that I haven't much to thank him for."

"Ah, Isaac," she pleaded, "do not be too hasty in your judgment. I am sure Mr. Greth would not have done what he has done if he had not had some pure motive. And how do you know but what the poor man's heart may have been broken in early life through some love affair?"

Luck laughed derisively, as he exclaimed,

"Old Greth in love! Well, upon my word, the idea's too absurd altogether. I don't believe he was ever capable of loving mortal being except himself."

"I do not like to hear you speak so bitterly of a man who has been a friend to you," said Lena, reproachfully. "You do not know what secrets he may have, nor what his motives have been. It is very likely that in you he saw some resemblance to some one; to some dead child, perhaps, for aught you know."

"Not a bit," answered Isaac, his scepticism being impregnable to argument; and in the next sentence he perhaps struck the true keynote to his prejudice against Mr. Greth. "The fact is," he continued, "he wanted some wretched, abandoned orphan that he could train up to his business, and make a machine of like himself. He found me and took me, but I haven't turned out as he wanted. Perhaps he didn't train me properly, or I was too tough to mould, or something like that. At any rate, I don't think I've answered the old buffer's expectations. But that is not my fault. I've always done my duty, and I'll defy him, or anyone else, to say I have not; and if he is not satisfied I can very soon get another shop."

Lena did not like to hear him speak in this way, for when he used to write his boyish letters to her he told her a great deal about Mr. Greth, and what he had done, and she had also learned a good deal more since the renewal of the acquaintance. Very naturally, therefore, she believed that Isaac had cause to be grateful, and she did not like ingratitude. But under the circumstances she deemed it not wise to say any more on the subject then, and so she answered,

"You have not yet told me, love, what your reply is to my letter."

"Well, on one point," he said, "my answer is soon given. I certainly shall not write to Mrs. Gascoigne."

"Ah, Isaac, for my sake do."

"For your sake, Lena, I will do much, but I will not do that, because I am convinced it would have no effect, and I should only be still further insulted."

"Very well, dear," she said, with a sorrowful sigh, recognising that it was but waste of time to urge him further. "A wilful man must have his way, you know. What do you intend to do, then?"

"We will get married as soon as possible ; that is, if you are not afraid to have a poor man for your husband."

"I am not afraid of poverty, and shall be very happy with you, however small our means may be. Besides, we will hope that we shall not always be poor. You are young, and by steady application you will be able to work yourself into a good position. You have already got a post of responsibility, and it will, no doubt, lead to something very much better. But when you say, dear, that we will be married soon, what is your idea of soon?"

"Well, say, in a month or six weeks."

"A month or six weeks!"

"Yes."

"That is very soon, is it not?"

"What is the use of waiting?"

"One use would be to get a little money together. Because however economical we may be there must necessarily be some expense. I have a small sum of my own saved. It is not very much. I think about £60: it will go some way towards furnishing a small house ; but under any circumstances we should have to wait a little longer than you say."

"Why?" he asked, rather sharply.

"Because I could not think of leaving Mrs. Gascoigne until she is ready to start for home."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Gascoigne again," he cried, with his old irritability.

"Well, dear, whether you are angry or not, I shall certainly remain, unless, of course, she turns me out before then. I cannot altogether behave to her like an ingrate." She said this gently, but with a firmness that left him no room to doubt that she quite meant what she said.

When he had mentioned a "month or six weeks" he knew perfectly well that it was a very random way of speaking, for he would be no better off then than he was now. With the thoughtlessness and recklessness, however, that were very marked traits in his character, he would have married on that £60 she had spoken of, together with a few pounds he himself could put to it. But she had decided against that, and her request was so reasonable that unreasonable as he was he could not object to it.

"How long will it be before my enemy goes?" he asked, sneeringly.

"Do you mean Mrs. Gascoigne?"

"Yes."

"Then I do wish Isaac, dear, that you would not speak so disrespectfully of her. You hurt my feelings, and I do not see why you should do that. Well, I do not think she will go before another six months. It may even be longer, for she cannot go before her husband's affairs are wound up. He left a good bit of property in India, and there has been some bother about it."

"Of course, you will see me often in the meantime?" he asked.

"I cannot promise that, but I will see you occasionally," she answered, with a sigh. "Oh, it does so pain me to have to be deceitful. But it's for your sake, and I hope I shall be forgiven. I don't know now when we can meet again, but I'll send you a little chit and tell you."

"Let it be soon, Lena, or else I shall come to the house," he remarked, as he kissed her, and then stood listening to her retreating footsteps, as she sped lightly up the path. When the sounds were heard no more he turned away, and hiring a gharry, drove up to Spence's to meet his friend Behrens.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“UNHAPPY IS THE BRIDE THAT THE RAIN RAINS ON.”

IT is not necessary to follow in close detail Luck's career for the next few months. It must be stated, however, that the prospect of his marriage with Lena had a beneficial effect upon him, and he became more steady and regular in his habits, making also an effort to accumulate a little money. In this respect, though, he was not very successful. He seemed to have very little knowledge of the real value of money, and he spent what he got stupidly and recklessly.

He was in the habit of seeing Lena once a week. The meetings were always clandestine ones, and not of long duration. She was always in terror lest she should be discovered, and would never stay long. These stolen interviews, however, served to strengthen her love for him, until she came to think that without him life would be unbearable.

By care and watchfulness she was enabled to conceal her connection with Isaac from Mrs. Gascoigne. If that lady suspected that there was something going on she gave no sign of her suspicions, but it is highly probable she did not, for she was a woman of such sterling integrity that she would hardly have been likely to have remained quiet if she had had any idea that deception was being practised.

It is not too much to say that the renewal of Lena's connection with her old schoolfellow brought a shadow into her life that was to deepen and deepen, and never more depart until she lay dead. She loved Isaac, but she sank with keen sensitiveness from the deceit she was guilty of on his account. From the very first secret meeting she had felt as if she could never look Mrs. Gascoigne in the face again. She was always conscious of a trouble present with

her. It was as if a skeleton followed her every footstep all day, and lay down with her at night. She heard the rattle of its dry, mouldy bones for ever in her ears ; and many an hour in the darkness and silence of her chamber did she weep bitterly.

And yet she suffered all, endured all, and played this double part for the sake of the love she had given to Isaac Luck.

If she had been compensated for all this by the strong, ardent, devoted love of a brave man she would have been perfectly content. But Luck was wanting in the elevating qualities of that nobility of mind and heart which mark the hero of every-day life. He was too selfish to ever make a woman happy. He was fond of, even infatuated with, Lena at this time, but he did not love her, however much he might have believed he did. And it would have been no great wrench, if a wrench at all, for him to have parted from her. And yet, as we have said, his connection with her and prospect of marriage did influence him in a considerable degree, and he was the better for it. On Lena's side the love was a great reality—all-absorbing, and, so to speak, life itself to her. The following fact will prove this :—

One morning she was in Mrs. Gascoigne's boudoir when that lady was reading some letters she had received by the mail.

"I think, dear," said Mrs. Gascoigne, "that you will now admit that I was not wrong in my estimate of Isaac Luck. This is what Mr. Tremaine says of him :—

" BOMBAY.

"DEAR MADAM,—I have the honour to reply to your esteemed favour marked *private and confidential*, and in which you ask me to furnish you with my opinion of Isaac Luck. Had it not been for your special request that I should give you my opinion of his moral character, I should simply have confined myself to saying that in his business capacity no word can be said against him. He has always performed his duties well and thoroughly, and his honesty is above suspicion. Under these circumstances, therefore, it pains me exceedingly to have to say that in all other respects his moral character is not such as those who are interested in him could desire. And yet I should like to qualify this by remarking that his youth must be taken into consideration. As regards your final question, as to whether he is likely to make a good husband for a young

woman in whom you are deeply interested, I should say certainly not at present. He is too flighty and undecided, and, as it seems to me, too apt to become enamoured with every pretty face he sees. And, while on this subject, I deem it my duty to inform you that when he was first sent out to me, the respected head of our firm, Mr. Greth, made a very emphatic request that I would use every endeavour, so far as I could, to prevent Isaac Luck forming an attachment to any young woman. What Mr. Greth's motive for this was I can only guess at, and as my guess might be very far wrong, I must ask you to pardon me for not mentioning it.—With respectful compliments, dear Madam, I am, your faithful servant,

“JOHN TREMAINE.”

“You see, dear child,” Mrs. Gascoigne remarked, as she folded the letter up and put it into her desk, “I am not so very cruel after all. And you ought to congratulate yourself in having escaped being drawn into a union with a young man that could not have failed to have blighted your life. Old schoolfellows, however nice they may have been during school-days, are not always desirable companions in after years.”

The only words Lena could utter to all this were, “I am very sorry.” She felt faint and sick at heart, but made a desperate effort to control herself in order that Mrs. Gascoigne might not notice how deeply affected she was.

That very evening she stole out to meet Isaac by pre-appointment. These meetings invariably took place in Mrs. Gascoigne's grounds. The grounds were well-wooded with shrubs and palms, and the many paths and quiet nooks were well designed for lovers to do their billing and cooing. And Lena also had the advantage in this arrangement of being able to pop into the house quickly. She was very downcast on this particular evening, and noticing this Isaac asked her what was the cause of her depression.

“Perhaps it is, dear, that I do not feel very well,” she answered, which was really the truth, for she had been upset in the morning, and since then had suffered from headache. When the time came for her to part from him, however, she hung round his neck and said, “Isaac, darling, I want to ask you a question.”

There was something in her tone and manner that rather startled

him. He felt by instinct that whatever it was she was going to ask, it was not very pleasant.

"Well, what is it?" he said.

"Tell me, dear," she said, very lovingly; "tell me, dear, do you know of any reason why Mr. Greth should not wish you to get married?"

He started as if she had struck him, and he grew pale, though she did not see that. His agitation and annoyance arose from the thought that flashed into his mind, that either she or Mrs. Gascoigne had been writing to Mr. Greth.

"No," he answered, angrily. "No reason whatever. Why do you ask?"

"I have a reason, dear," she replied, with great hesitation, and regretting, now that it was too late, that she had referred at all to the subject.

"What is your reason?" he demanded, so roughly that she remonstrated with him by saying,

"Isaac, you have no business to speak to me in that tone. I am not your servant."

"Look here, Lena, I don't want to speak to you unkindly, nor to quarrel with you, but it seems to me as if there has been something underhand going on, and your question makes me suspect that you have been writing to Mr. Greth."

"Your suspicions are wrong, Isaac," she replied, quietly; "I have done nothing of the sort."

"Then somebody has been telling you something?"

"I have heard this," she said, "that Mr. Greth is very desirous that you should form no matrimonial engagement."

He stamped his foot passionately as he exclaimed,

"Mr. Greth may go to the devil. What has he got to do with me or my affairs? Because I am a pauper's outcast, and Mr. Greth bought me, he is not going to make me his slave. But ever since I first went into his office he has always tried to domineer over me. If he has taught me his business he has been well repaid by the work I've done; so that whatever advantages there may be they are mutual. But I am not going to allow Mr. Greth or anyone else to interfere with my private arrangements."

Lena felt a little frightened. She had never seen him exhibit temper like this before.

"I am sorry, very sorry indeed, Isaac," she said, "that I mentioned this matter."

"Tell me," he cried, in no way appeased, "how did you hear this?"

"I cannot tell you that," she said, nervously.

"But you must tell me. You have no business to hint at a thing, and then refuse to state why you have done so."

"I have reasons of my own for declining to tell you how I heard this," she said, showing some firmness.

"Very well; do as you like," he returned, flippantly. "If you don't choose to tell me I cannot make you. But at any rate you will understand that old Greth has no business whatever to interfere with me except in a business way. And if I don't do my business to his satisfaction the remedy is in his own hands, and he can discharge me. For my own part, I don't much care whether he does or not."

"I think, dear, you are too headstrong," said Lena, approaching him again, and laying her hand soothingly on his; "and I am sorry you cannot speak more respectfully of your employer. You may depend upon it he has some good motive for wishing to control your movements, and I think you are decidedly wrong in not looking at it in that light."

"Very well, we'll agree to differ," he answered.

This little passage of words caused Lena a good deal of sorrow, for it had served to show her a little—very little, it is true, but still a little—of his true character, and that slight insight caused her much anxiety and worry.

During the silent hours of a restless night she asked herself seriously whether, after all, Mrs. Gascoigne was not right in her estimate of Isaac; and whether she ought not, for her own sake, to break off the connection.

When a woman has given her heart to a man there is nothing in the whole world more difficult for her to do than to believe or think ill of him. A woman's love is her faith, and her faith is the very quintessence of the happiness of her life. Destroy that faith, and you at once sever the bonds that give her the main hold on existence. Lena was perfectly well aware that she would have to endure a tremendous struggle with herself to give him up, and if she succeeded

at last in breaking the connection, would she not in the severance also break her own heart?

It has been asked in the course of this record if it was not Fate that first brought the boy and girl together; and it may well be asked here, if it was not a Destiny, dark, cruel, and incomprehensible, that bound her as a woman now to him as a man. If, during that night, as she lay and argued with herself, she had only resolved to cast herself free from him her life's current would at once have flowed into a channel, the end of which would have been peace. But by not doing this that incomprehensible destiny would hurry her on into the dark shadows of an infinite sorrow and a cruel death. It is strange that a woman's love should so often destroy her. When Lena rose in the morning she had decided *not* to give him up; and to ease her tortured mind she, woman-like, wrote thus to him :—

"DARLING ! I have been so unhappy all night at the thought that I may have said something to you last night that hurt your feelings. Will you forgive me, Isaac dear, and I will never do it again. It does distress me so much when I know you are angry with your poor, silly, little girl. But if you only knew, Isaac, how much I *do* love you, you never would lose your temper with me, no matter how silly I might be. I wish, dear, when you are inclined at any time to feel angry with me, you will remember how once, when I was your child-wife, ever so many years ago, you said, when I asked you if you would always love me for your little wife, 'Why, of course I will, Lena. God would be very angry with me if I didn't.' You may long since have forgotten those words, Isaac, but there are some things that a woman never, never forgets, and those words I have never forgotten. They made me so happy then, that I kept repeating them over and over again until I knew them by heart; and one day I wrote them down in a little book I had, and in which I used to write things about you. I still have that little book, and one of these days I will show it to you, and then you will know how much I loved you, even in those early years. I was only a child then. Now I am a woman, and I give you my woman-love as I gave you my child-love. Do not trifle with it, dear, dear Isaac, because I shall always be so faithful and true to you. Good-bye, my own dear Isaac, for the present. I will try and see you again soon."

Isaac was really touched by this letter, as well he might be ; and when, a few days afterwards, he saw her she was unusually affectionate, and he made ever so many good resolutions.

During all the time Isaac was carrying on these secret interviews with Lena, he was never able to see her in the daytime. The meetings were always at night, and in the grounds of Mrs. Gascoigne's house. He had pressed her often to accompany him on excursions, but she resolutely refused ; and there is little doubt that it was due to this that she was enabled to keep her connection with Isaac a secret from Mrs. Gascoigne. He, however, began to tire of this. The interviews seldom extended over half an hour, and as it was nearly four miles from Calcutta to Garden Reach, he had a journey of eight miles. And so it came to pass that on two or three occasions when she wrote making an appointment he failed to go, much to her grief and disappointment, and on these occasions it generally happened that he was spending his time with Behrens, with whom he had become more intimate than ever.

Nearly a year slipped away, and owing to the legal business in connection with her late husband's affairs not being settled, Mrs. Gascoigne could fix no time for going home. This news, as may be imagined, was by no means welcome to Isaac, and he told Lena that the time had come when she must choose between himself and Mrs. Gascoigne, as he had resolved not to wait any longer. He gave her this as an ultimatum, and again did she go through a time of agony ; but her love for the man triumphed over her sense of duty to Mrs. Gascoigne.

Poor thing ! She was to be pitied, not blamed.

She consented to become his wife ; but she showed herself determined on one point, and she carried it. That was, they were to be married quietly, and immediately after the wedding she was to return to Garden Reach and remain there until Mrs. Gascoigne was ready to sail. This matter being settled, he made preparations for the event. It was arranged that she was to come up to town some morning on the plea of having some little matters of shopping to do on her own account. Of course, Isaac took his dear friends the Behrens into his confidence, and Mr. Behrens consented to act the part of the father, while his wife was to be a witness.

Never did woman set out to her wedding with heavier heart or

more gloomy forebodings than did Lena on the morning of her marriage day. And as if Nature herself were angry, a violent thunderstorm broke over Calcutta, and for nearly three hours the lightning and thunder were terrific, while the rain descended in torrents.

Lena was attired in ordinary dress, and she rode up to Calcutta in a gharry alone. She was met by Isaac, who said,

"I didn't tell you before, dear, but I may mention it now, my friends the Behrens have kindly consented to help us in this matter."

She almost felt as if she would faint when she heard this; and it is pretty certain if someone had been near then to whisper to her to come away she would have gone, and never have held communication with him again. But he swayed and influenced her, and she felt powerless. She went through the ceremony almost as if she had been in a dream; and when she and Isaac Luck were pronounced man and wife, and Mr. Behrens caught her in his arms and kissed her, she shrank from him with horror and repugnance, and her pent-up feelings finding vent at last, she sobbed hysterically.

It was with difficulty her husband soothed her, and with still greater difficulty that he persuaded and influenced her to get into Behrens' carriage and drive to their house.

They had provided a grand breakfast. Fruit and flowers and champagne, and fish, flesh and fowl, with an ostentatious display of silver, and splendid glass and fine linen. Lena saw it all in a dazed way. She ate nothing nor drank, save a few drops of the sparkling wine. She heard Mrs. Behrens address her as "my dear child," and she shivered inwardly. And later, when faint and sick, she had prayed and craved to be allowed to sit alone on the verandah, in the open air, she shrieked with terror as though one of the country's deadly snakes had twined itself about her. And the cause of her shriek was Mr. Behrens, who, flushed with champagne, had stolen noiselessly behind her chair, and bending down until his foetid breath fanned her cheek, he whispered, with a greasy smile on his shining face, "I tasted the exquisite nectar of your lips this morning, and it made me drunk. I must sip again at the same fount."

And then the brute kissed her.

She sprang to her feet, white and trembling, and when her new-made husband, Mrs. Behrens, and her sons and daughters rushed on to the verandah, attracted by her scream, she could not have looked more horror-stricken or ill if she had really been bitten by a snake.

It was on her lips to tell the cause of her terror, but she checked herself in an instant, fearing that it might lead to a quarrel between the two men, or between the husband and wife, so she stammered out,

"Pray, forgive me for my stupidity. I am so dreadfully nervous this morning, and Mr. Behrens frightened me by coming behind my chair."

The oily face of Mrs. Behrens darkened with an angry frown, as, looking at her husband, who was standing there placid as a lamb, she said, sternly, "Behrens, you brute, go into the house immediately; and you, too, children."

Poor Lena almost felt as if she could have fallen on to the neck of this mountain of flesh, and have expressed her thanks in kisses.

"Sit down, child, with your husband, and compose yourself," said the lady; and then, groaning under her weight of flesh, she followed her family into the house. Then Lena sank into Isaac's arms and, with a moan, said, "O Isaac, husband, if you do not wish to be a widower before a day a bridegroom, let me go back at once to my quiet home at Garden Reach, or I shall fall down dead at your feet."

She really seemed so excited and so ill that he was frightened, and so, borrowing Behren's buggy, he drove her down to the Reach. She recovered considerably on the way, and when she reached the point where she was to alight she embraced Isaac with great warmth, and said,

"Oh, my beloved husband, I have an undefinable sense of dread that we have done a foolish thing, and taken a step that will bring sorrow upon our heads."

Somehow the words found an echo in his own heart. They had certainly made a very bad beginning of married life. He returned her embraces, however, and soothed her as best he could. Then for a time husband and wife parted, and thus closed another act in the tragic drama of Isaac Luck's life.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB.

WHEN Isaac Luck came to reflect upon the step he had taken, he could not help the conviction that he had for once in his life committed a grave error in burdening himself with a wife. He had rushed into the thing with mad precipitancy, and with a boyish disregard for eventualities. He had seen only to-day, and had not deigned to cast his eyes towards to-morrow. But now the morrow had come, and the act of yesterday rather startled him. He had up to the present developed certain Bohemian proclivities, that were as objectionable as they were sad in a man so young; but though he had thus cut himself adrift from conventionalities, and thought it rather the proper sort of thing to ignore those unwritten laws, which, though unwritten, are nevertheless as rigid as those of the Medes and Persians—which society has edged itself about with—he could not ignore the stern fact that now stared him in the face, namely, that by the rites of the church and the law of the land, whose subject he was, he had made himself a husband, and was responsible for the well-being of his wife.

The records of human folly and wickedness are crowded with stories so strange and startling, so wild and wonderful, so silly and ridiculous, that one almost hesitates to give them credence, notwithstanding their mint stamp of truth. But it is not often that a man, however young or however foolish, rushes into such a senseless marriage as Isaac had done. Senseless in this respect, that he had not married Lena because he wanted a home, because he wanted a companion, because he wanted somebody to look after him, because he felt that he wanted a restraining curve to check his downward course; he had done it for none of these things, but simply for the sake of marrying, with perhaps some sort of vague and boyish idea

that he was outwitting Mrs. Gascoigne and having revenge upon her. It is quite certain that had he seriously reflected upon the gravity of the step he must have paused before taking it. But he was not of a reflecting nature. He lacked the power of reasoning either *à priori* or *priori*. He saw things exactly as they appeared before his eyes, and never dreamed of tracing all their subtle ramifications and their bearings upon other things. His marriage, foolish as it was, had this effect upon him for the time being, it led him to be a little less irregular, and to have a little more self-respect.

A week passed, and he neither heard from nor communicated with his wife. But at the end of that time he received a letter from her in which she said,

“I have been very ill, my beloved husband. The excitement of the eventful morning was too much for me, and when I reached here I was quite prostrated. Dear Mrs. Gascoigne was very much alarmed, and naturally sought to know the cause of my illness. I told her I thought I had been affected by the heat and the terrible thunderstorm, which, as you will remember, dear, marked our marriage morning. She would insist on sending for her doctor, who pronounced me suffering from some strong excitement, and prescribed rest. I am better now, but still far from well. But my physical suffering has been nothing compared to what I have suffered mentally. O Isaac, my husband! you don't know how wicked I appear in my own sight when I remember how I have deceived my friend and benefactress, Mrs. Gascoigne. She is such a good woman, so kind, so gentle, so thoughtful for my welfare, that I seem to hate myself for not being candid with her. During the last few days she has been as attentive to me as a fond mother, and has been making little plans for my future; and I, with a sense of terrible guilt on my conscience, have not dared to look her in the face, but have shrunk away with dread lest she should see the word *deception* written in burning characters on my face. I am sure, my beloved husband, that you are desirous of making me happy; and I know that I shall be very happy indeed with you when circumstances will permit us to be together. But now the best way you can promote my happiness, even if it is not the only way, is to allow me to remain free from your control for a time, and for each of us to go on our way as if we had not done so serious an act as

bound ourselves together for life. I know, of course, that the request is an extraordinary, if not a silly one ; but still I am convinced that it is to my happiness, if not to your own, that we remain apart for a time, and keep our marriage a locked secret, and when a favourable time comes I will make it known to Mrs. Gascoigne, and get her to countenance it.

“I know, dear, that I am your wife. I know that I have bound myself to you by a solemn and irrevocable act, but still I crave you to let me remain as a free woman for another year or two. Let me accompany Mrs. Gascoigne to England, where, some day, I will tell her I am a wife. I can never tell her now. I feel that the trial will be too terrible to endure, and her reproaches would drive me mad. But later on it will be easier. Time will have so softened her prejudice against you, especially when she learns that you acceded to my request, and allowed me to remain practically free. This, in itself, will be sufficient to convince her that you were anxious to study my happiness. You need have no fear of losing me. You have secured me to yourself. In the eyes of God and man I am your lawful wife, and I shall always be true and faithful to you as long as I breathe. Therefore, dear husband, let me do as I wish ; and whenever you like to write to me and say come, I will return to you. By that time we shall be in a better position to commence our career as husband and wife. You will have saved some money, so shall I, and with our united savings we shall be able to begin house-keeping comfortably.

“If you consent to the proposal I have made, darling, I will arrange to see you again before I go, and wish you good-bye.

“You must not suppose, dear, that, in suggesting this thing to you, I do it with any other motive than a conscientious belief that we are performing a duty to ourselves. Every woman looks upon her bridal days as amongst the very happiest she can know in life. These are my bridal days, but as yet they are filled with a haunting fear for me. You can still this fear. You can change it into pleasure ; and in the future—a future that is not far off—we will come together again never more to part, and our bridal days shall be days of supreme happiness. Do this thing, my husband, for your little wife’s sake, and bring sunshine into my heart where there is at this moment only a heavy shadow.”

Isaac was much impressed by this letter, and he saw that the reasons set forth by his wife for the course she suggested were in themselves sound and justifiable, and he made up his mind to fall in with her views. He therefore wrote to tell her that he acquiesced in what she wished, and to say that she was to make an appointment to see him. This was done, and for some time, and on an average once a week, he and his wife continued to meet in the old place as they had done before their marriage. Her love for him, and the sound common-sense she showed, were working a most beneficial result, and Isaac's disposition became better. But this was not to last.

It happened one day that Mr. Behrens gave a party at his house in celebration of the birthday of one of his sons. Of course, Isaac was a guest. The invitation also included Isaac's wife, and although he had asked her to try and accompany him, she had declined, and he did not press her.

When Luck turned up alone, Mr. Behrens, as did also his wife, expressed great astonishment, and he seemed to be particularly disappointed.

Later on in the evening, when the guests had adjourned to the verandah after dinner, Mr. Behrens rove his arm through that of Isaac's, and said,

"Let's take a turn down the garden, old fellow. I'm going to have a quiet chat with you."

It was a beautiful night—a night of silver effulgence; for the moon was nearly at its full. Every tree and shrub was perfectly discernible, and it almost seemed as if the colours of the flowers could be distinguished. The air was balmy and heavy with the scent of the magnolias, and there was an exquisite beauty of calm and softness, which after the glow and dust of the fervid day was most agreeable.

Isaac was hot and flushed. He had drunk a fair share of champagne, which, together with the stifling atmosphere of the dining-room, which even the silken punkahs could not temper, had served to muddle him a little. Perhaps his Jewish friend noticed this, for he took several turns round the garden without speaking. They were both smoking, though Isaac seemed to enjoy his cigar in a very languid, weary sort of way. At last, stopping in his walk, he said,

"I thought you were going to have a chat, Behrens."

"So I am, dear boy, but I felt that a little quiet strolling first would do neither of us any harm. Well now, look here, what I want to ask you is this. Why didn't you bring the missus with you to-night?"

"Because she didn't want to come."

If Isaac had been able to have seen the peculiar expression, half-anger, half-hate, that these words brought into his friend Behrens' oily face, he might have been so struck that he would have instituted inquiries as to the cause. But he did not notice it.

"Didn't want to come!" echoed Behrens, standing still, and unlinking his arm as he looked at the speaker. "Why didn't she want to come? Surely what is good enough for the husband is good enough for the wife? My drum may be humble, and not so superb as the one she's been used to, but still I don't think she ought to snub her husband's friends for their humility, you know, after all," he added, sarcastically, and then taking the arm again he resumed the walk.

"It isn't that, dear boy," Isaac returned, "but you see she was afraid Mrs. Gascoigne might get to know of it."

Again the Jew stopped. Again he let go the arm. Again he looked contemptuously at the young man, and again he was angry, but this time he displayed it in manner and tone.

"Mrs. Gascoigne!" he exclaimed, "who the devil is Mrs. Gascoigne that she should control your wife?"

"Well, you see, in the first place, she doesn't know yet that we are married; but under any circumstances Lena would have refused to have come."

"Refused!" Mr. Behrens almost shrieked; "refused!" he repeated. "Good God, you don't mean to say you are going to allow your wife to refuse to do as you tell her?" Then he laughed mockingly and scornfully, as he added, "Why, if my wife were to refuse to do anything that I told her, by heavens, there would be a rumpus in the house, I tell you. Well, well, I didn't think you were such a meek and mild young man."

Isaac felt very uneasy. He did not like this sort of banter.

"The fact is" he said, "she would not refuse me anything, but although we are married we've decided not to be man and wife, in

actual fact, for some time, and I've given her permission to go to England with Mrs. Gascoigne."

Once more Mr. Samuel Behrens stopped, and broke into coarse, derisive laughter. His greasy, perspiring face glistened in the moonlight, and his great frame quivered like a jelly as he gave vent to those great guffaws, which were laughter, it was true, but it was the unmistakable laughter of pure derision.

"Upon—my—word," he said, jerking his words out in gasps, for the exertion he had undergone had taken his breath away. "You are a griffin. Look here, Luck, old boy, if anyone but yourself had told me that, I should have called that person a ——. Well, that is, I should have said that he and the truth had no affinity. Why, my good friend, Isaac, you are either a little mad, a little drunk, or a little idiotic. Which is it?"

"I say, Behrens, I wish you wouldn't make a fool of me," cried Isaac, as his host paused to recover his breath.

Mr. Behrens once again took Luck's arm, and putting his face close to his he said in a fawning, confidential way,

"If what you say is true, dear fellow, I can't make a fool of you, because you'll be a fool already made. But the fact is, you are having your little larks, you know. It is you who are making a fool of me. Eh? Is that not it?"

"No, certainly not," answered Isaac, by no means comfortable under this fire of badinage. "What I've told you is true, and I've consented to let Lena go home."

"And do you expect ever to see her again?"

"Certainly, I do."

"Then you are a far greener young man than I could have imagined you to be."

"Do you not think, then, that she will come back?" Isaac asked, rather simply.

"Do I not think so? Do you think, my boy, that I'm an ass? Do you suppose that if old Mother Gascoigne once gets her away she will ever let you see her again? Why, you might as well expect that the moon yonder would stop shining because you told it to do so. And do you think for a moment, if you once let Lena out of your sight, that she's going to care any more for you? Not a bit of it. I know what women are too well. I've had too much to do

with them to be hoodwinked by a girl, I tell you. All women are as artful as rats and as cunning as foxes."

"So they may be, but I don't believe Lena is," Isaac remarked, somewhat warmly.

"Tut man," Behrens spluttered, "she's a woman, and they're all alike. The whole fact of the matter is this. She married you in a sentimental moment, and without thinking about it. Now she repents and wants to get away."

He bent his head down till his bulging, moist red lips were on a line with Isaac's ear; then he whispered, insinuatingly, "If you were to ask my opinion, I should say there was another man in the case."

This wicked and cruel remark caused Isaac to start inwardly, as it were, and an uncomfortable sensation appeared to run through the roots of his hair, and to tingle in the tips of his ears and his finger ends. The beat of his heart increased, and a warm, clammy perspiration came out on his forehead and temples.

"By heavens, if I thought that," he muttered, between set teeth. Then he stopped himself, and added, "No, no, Behrens, I don't believe it."

Mr. Behrens shrugged his shoulders in scorn, and answered,

"All right, my friend. You are not the first man who has been bamboozled by a woman by many a long way. Come, let us go in, I want a drink."

Isaac's brain was all in a tumult, and the blood in his veins seemed to have got so hot that it burned him. He moved a few steps towards the house, then stopped.

"Look here, Behrens, do you really think I ought to prevent her going?"

Mr. Behrens laid his heavy, fat, white, podgy hands on Isaac's shoulders, one on each shoulder, and stood thus looking into his white, anxious face.

"Do I really think you ought to prevent her going?" he repeated. "If I had no respect and regard for you, my dear young friend, I should say let her go, by all means. But I consider it's a shame that you should be gulled; and if I were in your place I would take her away, if it were only to be revenged on that sweet old woman, Mrs. Gascoigne."

He dropped his hands by his side and stood waiting for the answer.

Isaac did not speak immediately. He was troubled, and there was a conflict raging within him. But at last thus,

"I believe you are right, Behrens. But what am I to do? I've nowhere to take the wife to at present."

"Why don't you get a place, then?"

"It's all very well to say, why don't I get a place? How am I going to do it?"

"What's the main difficulty, dear boy?"

"Well, you know very well that to take a house means expense, and at the present moment I'm not prepared to meet it."

"Well, now, I'll tell you what I'll do," said Mr. Behrens, as he mopped his dripping forehead. "I'll solve that little problem for you—and, you take my word for it, it's not many men I would help in the same way. But I like you, and I think it's a pity that dear little wife of yours should be spoiled by an ogress like Mrs. Gascoigne. If it were only for the sake of spiting that woman I would do it. You know the pretty little bungalow there, on the Howrah side of the river, to the left of the landing-place of the ferry?"

"Do you mean the one with the garden coming down to the river?"

"Yes."

"Oh yes, I know that house quite well. I've often thought what a delightful little snuggerly it was."

"Very well, that place is mine, rump and stump. Old Potts, the carriage builder, lived in it for years, and when he died I bought it just as it stood, furniture and all. You shall have it on a three years' lease at a low rent. And I'll sell you the furniture at a mere trifle. What do you say? Is it a bargain?"

Isaac hesitated before he spoke. Then, timidly,

"What would the rent be?"

"Fifteen hundred rupees for the lease."

"And the furniture?"

"Well, I'll let you have that very cheap. A couple of thou."

"Rupees?"

"Yes."

"Why, that's two hundred pounds."

"I'm aware of that, dear boy."

"Well then, you must also be aware that it isn't in my power to pay you such a sum," said Isaac, a little tartly.

“We’ll make that all right. You can give me your note. Pay me whenever you can. I like to help a friend and good fellow like you. At any rate sleep on the proposal. I’ll run you across any-way in the morning in my dingy, and you can see the place. Why, you and the little woman will be as cosy and happy as doves there ! Come, let us go in now, or the folks will think we’re hatching some conspiracy.”

CHAPTER XX.

“LIFE IS NOT GREY FOR YOU YET.”

ISAAC LUCK did go across the river the following morning to the Howrah side with Mr. Behrens, to look at the bungalow owned by that gentleman. It was a prettily-situated place, with a good deal of well-wooded ground about it. It was a one-storied building, with a verandah running all round it; and there was a path going right down to the water's edge, where a little bay had been constructed for a boat or two. The rental value of it, however, was not more than two-thirds of what Mr. Behrens had asked. The furniture was old-fashioned and dilapidated, but such as it was there was plenty of it. A hundred pounds would have been more than its value.

Isaac was pleased with the idea of becoming a householder, and, tempted by the specious arguments of the wily Behrens, he agreed to take it, and to buy the furniture for a hundred and fifty pounds, giving his note of hand for the amount. Three days after this he went up by appointment to Mr. Behrens' lawyer, at whose office he signed the lease and the promissory-note, and the key of the bungalow was handed to him. His next step was to engage some native servants, and, that done, the only thing remaining was to bring his wife.

Not one single word of his arrangements had he mentioned to her up to this moment. She had remained in blissful ignorance, and for some days had been busy helping Mrs. Gascoigne to pack, for that lady had at last announced her intention of proceeding to England by the next mail.

Without any pre-arrangement or forewarning Isaac presented himself at Mrs. Gascoigne's house and asked to see Lena. He

was shown, as usual, into the reception-room, and in a few minutes his wife stood before him. She looked dumbfounded when she saw who the visitor was, and without greeting him in any way she could only stammer forth,

"Isaac, you here? What does this mean?"

The whole transaction of his taking the house had been done with a sort of rush that had left him no time for reflection; but now the sight of her pained face and her astonishment rather startled him, and he was conscious of a trembling, sneaking manner, as with averted eyes he answered her,

"Well, Lena, it means this—I want you to go away with me."

"To go away with you?"

"Yes. You needn't look so utterly amazed."

"Are you not playing a cruel joke upon me?"

"No, indeed, I'm not."

"Have you forgotten, then, what you promised?"

"What did I promise?"

"That I should be free to go to England with Mrs Gascoigne."

"No, I have not forgotten it, but you see I've changed my mind."

"Isaac, are you mad?" she gasped.

"No, I don't see much indication of madness in wishing to have you with me. You are my wife, and I have a right to have your company and society."

"You have, Isaac," she said, speaking firmly now, and looking at him with cutting reproach, "but if you are a man of honour, if you have the slightest regard for your pledged word, you will let me carry out the arrangement we agreed to. Nay, Isaac, you must, for I could not, dare not, leave Mrs. Gascoigne now."

"I see no must in the case," he answered, growing a little red. "Every man is liable to make mistakes, and I made a mistake when I gave my consent to your going."

"O Isaac!" she moaned, stretching her hands towards him, appealingly, "for the sake of what we have been to each other in the past, and what we hope to be in the future, do not be cruel."

"Look here, Lena, what do you mean by saying I am cruel?" he asked, shifting about uneasily, and wishing at that moment

that he had not been led so much by Behrens. "Is it cruel for a man to want to enjoy his wife's society?"

"It is cruel for you, Isaac, to break your word, and to place me in this dreadful position," she answered, in sore distress.

"If you think so, I can't help it. I only know that you must go with me."

"It is impossible," she ejaculated, with a shudder.

"There is nothing impossible at all about it."

"But you haven't even a home to take me to."

"Oh, yes, I have," he returned, with a smile. "I've secured a house for three years, and bought the entire furniture for it."

She uttered a shivering sob, and covered her face with her hands. Then looking at him in a manner in which she had never looked at him before in all the years they had been acquainted, she said,

"If you have done this thing you have been guilty of meanness, and I blush to think that you are my husband."

He did not like this. He became pale, and his voice was not steady, as he made reply,

"This is rather a nice beginning of our married life. I've got a home for you, and I intend to do all I can to make you happy; and I think it's very hard now that I've married you that I cannot have you."

"You have made me your wife, it is true," she said, sternly, "but you haven't yet made me your slave. I refuse to go with you."

His passion rose at this, and the blood came into his face, as he said, quickly,

"Oh, indeed; we'll see about that, I'll make you go."

He might have said more at that moment had it not been that he was checked by the sudden appearance of Mrs. Gascoigne. She was angry and excited in a way that was quite unusual for her.

"This is audacity, sir!" she exclaimed. "My servant told me that you were here, and I have come to order you to leave my house."

With a cry of pain Lena threw her arms round the lady's neck, and fell weeping on her shoulder. Luck felt a coward's delight in

knowing that he was in position to deliver a stunning blow at this woman whom he absolutely hated.

"I am quite willing to go," he said, "when that young woman is ready to go with me."

"You are an insolent vagabond, sir," returned Mrs. Gascoigne, growing very red.

"Indeed," he sneered.

"Yes. And if you do not relieve me of your presence immediately, I'll set my servants to turn you out. This young lady is under my protection, and I'll protect her while I have breath in my body."

Lena was sobbing convulsively, her head buried in the lady's bosom. Isaac stood very pale and trembling, and there was a passionate working of the lips that betrayed that he was excited and angered.

"You have protected her long enough," he said, defiantly. "It is my turn now."

Holding Lena round the waist Mrs. Gascoigne made a movement towards the bell, when Isaac arrested her by exclaiming,

"Stop a minute, Mrs. Gascoigne, if you wish to avoid a scene before your servants. Lena is my wife, and I have come to claim her."

Mrs. Gascoigne reeled and staggered, and her face grew ashen.

Lena slipped down at her feet like an inert mass, but she shivered with the convulsive sobs that broke from her white lips, and she hid her face with her hands.

"Your—wife?" gasped Mrs. Gascoigne, who seemed as if she were going to fall herself; and she clutched at the back of a chair for support.

"Yes," he answered, feeling very ill at ease, but determined now to brazen it out, for matters had gone too far for retreat.

"It is false," the lady cried, indignantly. "Lena could never have deceived me so basely."

"Oh, it is true—true—true," the unhappy girl moaned, still crouching on the floor. "I am indeed his wife."

"Then, may God have pity on you," said Mrs. Gascoigne, bursting into tears.

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me!" Lena cried, looking up now, with

her face red and wet, and her hair clinging clammy about her forehead.

"Yes, child, I do forgive you," murmured the lady softly, "because I feel that the real sinner is that man."

"You may feel and think what you like, Mrs. Gascoigne," Isaac said, "but I can tell you this, that you have yourself to blame. If you had not prevented my seeing her I should have waited. I have known her ever since I was a mere baby, and I felt that I had a perfect right to see her."

Mrs. Gascoigne seemed to take no notice of what he said, but looking down to the weeping girl at her feet, she asked,

"Lena, are you lawfully, in the sight of heaven and man, this man's wife?"

"Yes, yes; in the sight of heaven I am. But take me away, take me away out of his presence."

Mrs. Gascoigne was so agitated that she could only murmur,

"Poor child, poor girl."

"Oh, I have been so wicked," Lena moaned, with passionate weeping. "But I must have been mad, or I should never have been so blind, so wicked. I should never have deceived you as I have done. You, who have been so kind, so good to me. I know that you ought to spurn me from you, but I feel so unhappy, so broken-hearted, that I plead to you for mercy, for pity."

"My poor, dear girl," said Mrs. Gascoigne, as raising her up, she folded her to her motherly bosom, "you have, indeed, my deep, heartfelt pity."

Isaac would have given a great deal at that moment to have undone the misery he had wrought, and he was more truly affected perhaps than he had been at any other period of his nineteen years of life. Sinner he was, it was too true; though he was not yet a hardened sinner, he was more a foolish one. But the mischief was done, and it could not be undone, and speaking, not without some evidence of emotion and uneasiness, he said,

"Well, Lena, it's no use prolonging this misery. Let us go."

She clung more closely to Mrs. Gascoigne, and sobbed, "Keep me, keep me."

Mrs. Gascoigne was too intelligent a woman not to see that at a time of poignant grief like this harsh words and reproaches would

do more harm than good, and would be like pouring boiling oil into open wounds. With difficulty she assumed something of her usual staid dignity, and still holding the trembling girl to her she said, addressing Isaac,

"You may well feel sorrow and shame, young man, at the misery and suffering your conduct has brought us. That you do so is to me a hopeful sign. But, nevertheless, the deceit you have practised places you beyond the pale of my sympathy and forgiveness. And if I do not take means to have you horsewhipped, it is on this poor girl's account. It was an evil day indeed when chance threw her into your way again, for I doubt very much your making her happy. But if you do not, you may depend upon it the Almighty will not let you go unpunished."

"Pray, do not preach to me," he said. "I never could stand preaching to. I wanted Lena for my wife, and you had no business to keep me from her. If you had not done that I should have waited. So it's you who are to blame."

"I would remind you that you are under my roof, sir, and that I am a lady; both of which facts entitle me to respect at your hands," she answered, frigidly, and looking at him with scorn.

"I give you as much respect as you give me," he retorted, for he could not get over his anger and dislike for her.

"I may claim the right, sir, at least, to ask you a few questions in your wife's interest," she remarked. "Have you a home to take her to?"

"Yes, I have."

"Is it such a home as she, who has always been well cared for, has a right to expect?"

"Well, I don't think she will have much cause to complain."

"And what means have you for keeping a wife?"

"I decline to answer that. You have no more right to ask me what my means are than I have to ask you what yours are."

"It is not your right, sir, to be insolent," the lady cried, with much warmth.

"Ah, Mrs. Gascoigne," moaned Lena, "do not excite yourself in this unhappy business. I know that you have good cause to be angry, and you ought to hate me for my detestable wickedness. But I would rather die than that you should suffer in any way."

Isaac was very anxious to put an end to the scene. He felt miserable, and wished himself well out of it. Much as he disliked Mrs. Gascoigne, he could not stand that frigid manner of hers and the scornful look. To put it expressively, he felt small in her presence. She had lowered him the last time he saw her. She had grievously wounded his vanity, and he was not the sort of young man to forgive that.

"Lena, please to get yourself ready to come with me," he said, studiously avoiding any show of authoritativeness.

"If Mrs. Gascoigne will keep me I shall not go with you," she answered.

"If he is your lawful husband," Mrs. Gascoigne replied, as if she was still incredulous, "I have no right to detain you, much as I might desire it."

A little triumphant expression asserted itself about the corners of Isaac's mouth, for he saw that he had broken Mrs. Gascoigne's power at any rate.

"The step you have taken," she continued, "has destroyed all the plans I had made for you, and you have taken your fate in your own hands. There is a saying, that having made your bed you must lie upon it. I fear it will have to apply in this case; and though the bed prove rough and thorny, it must be borne with, for the law gives this man a right and claim over you, unless he transgress that law. Your duty and your place are at your husband's side. And I will say this, that unless he be hard as steel, and steeped to the lips in infamy, he will grow a better and purer man by contact with you."

Lena raised herself up, and stood straight and steady. Her eyes were blurred, and the damp hair clung about her face, that was red with her weeping and excitement. Turning to Mrs. Gascoigne, she said, slowly and with pain,

"Your kindness and gentleness to me wound me infinitely deeper than your anger would have done. That you can forgive my baseness and ingratitude teaches me a noble lesson."

Then, looking at Isaac, she said, almost solemnly,

"I am your wife, you are my husband. I will try with God's help to do my duty."

She seemed to sway a little as though she was going to fall, and

he made a movement to support her ; but she steadied herself again, and said faintly,

"Do not touch me yet. I would rather that you did not. I will try and show love, and warmth and affection for you soon, but I cannot do it at present. Perhaps I am wrong, very wrong, but I cannot help it. You have for a time destroyed my faith in you, because the promise you made you have broken. Under this roof I have known many, many happy days ; and in this dear lady I have known a mother, at her hands I have experienced a mother's tenderness, a mother's love. I have repaid her with base ingratitude. I will not blame you for this. I will blame myself."

Her voice had grown weaker and weaker as she spoke, until, with a great convulsive sob, she sank down on the floor. Isaac would have lifted her up, but Mrs. Gascoigne interposed herself between them and said,

"Your wife is under my roof, and, let me believe, still under my protection. You see that she is not in a state to go with you now. Leave her with me. You can count upon her being tenderly nursed and cared for. To-morrow, or the next day after that, or at any rate within a week, say, I will relinquish my charge into your hands."

Isaac seemed a little doubtful how to act in the delicate situation in which this lady had placed him, and he was foolish enough to say,

"Can I trust you to do this?"

She drew herself up very proudly, and said, with biting scorn,

"I am an honest and truthful woman, sir."

That was all, but it was enough. It crushed him. He stammered something about that he would wait, and then clumsily left the room and the house ; and, when he regained the open air, he drew a great sigh as though he had been suddenly relieved of a load that had been pressing the breath out of him.

When he had gone Mrs. Gascoigne sat down on the floor and took the weeping girl's head into her lap, and then running her fingers through the dark hair in that soothing way that a woman knows so well how to employ, she kept saying, in a low, crooning tone,

"Hush, dear, hush. Poor thing, if you fret like that you will be ill. Hush, my child. Life is not grey for you yet. There is sunshine left. Come, be good now. Cease that sobbing."

So in this manner she went on for nearly a quarter of an hour, until Lena's sobs became more fitful, and her great agitation gradually calmed. At last she bent her head back until her face was upturned to the motherly one with its sad yearning look that was bowed towards her; and pressing her hot, flushed, wet cheek to the throbbing bosom, she flung her arms round the dear neck with a convulsive shudder, and clinging even as a drowning woman might cling to a spar that offered some hope of rescue, she moaned,

"O Mrs. Gascoigne, your kindness kills me!"

The lady bent her face still lower, until her soft lips touched the hot forehead with its clinging hair, and she replied, in whispered tones,

"I want you not to excite yourself. This is a storm that will pass away. You will rise strong again, and hopeful and dutiful. A woman must not suffer all her life, and lose all her life because of one mistake."

Under this soothing influence, such influence that oil is said to have on storm-swept waters, Lena's raging grief died down, and she was able to converse.

Her position was discussed in its bearings. But the fact remained that she was a wife; that her husband had a legal and moral claim upon her; and whatever her desires were, whatever her inclinations, whatever her yearnings, her place was by her husband's side.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MAN SHALL BE KNOWN BY HIS FRIENDS.

IT was exactly a week after that sad day when Isaac had announced to his wife the change in plan he had made, that once more, and for the last time, he found himself under the roof of Mrs. Gascoigne's house in Garden Reach. The week had certainly been an anxious one to him, and he had been very ill at ease, for notwithstanding the promise made by Mrs. Gascoigne, he was fearful that she was intent upon depriving him of Lena. But though he had this fear he dare not come within the radius of her anger again. She had awed him, and he had no wish to meet her any more, excepting he was compelled to do so. From his point of view it certainly did seem to him that he had been unfairly treated. His mind being free from anything like absolute evil design, he could not comprehend why Mrs. Gascoigne had been so desirous of keeping him and Lena apart. He knew, of course, that he had been wild, but it did not occur to him that that was a sufficiently justifiable reason why he should not be allowed to associate with a young woman whom he had known nearly all his life.

It is clear that at this time he was not without some sense of pride as he thought of Lena being his wife; and he experienced pleasure at being a householder, of having a home and servants of his own. Nor is it at all improbable that he would, after a fashion, and as thousands of other such men have done, have settled down into a humdrum existence; have gone through the usual matrimonial jars and squalls that were a certainty with a man so constituted; have given his wife a certain amount of deferential respect; have endeavoured to have brought up his children as honest citizens; and then, as years gave him wisdom and steadiness,

he would have become a thorough family man, with nothing more startling in his existence than the usual domestic events of a common-place household.

All these things might have come to pass had it not been for influences that he never dreamed of, and could not have reckoned upon; though, had it not been for his secret and hasty marriage, these influences would in all probability have affected him for good, and not for evil.

Well, at the end of the week, he was once more at Garden Reach. He had gone in answer to a frigid little note from Mrs. Gascoigne, in which she said,

"If you will be here to-morrow at eleven o'clock in the morning, your wife will be ready to accompany you to your home."

Once more he stood in the reception-room waiting for her. And when she appeared at last, with her bonnet and lace shawl on, he hastened to greet her. She neither smiled nor seemed glad to see him. Her face wore an expression of calm sadness, and though she did kiss him it was with the kiss of a statue. There was neither life nor warmth in it. He had half-expected to see Mrs. Gascoigne, but that lady did not appear. There were no congratulations, no smiles, no wishing him long life and happiness. All was cold, frigid.

"I am going with you, Isaac, not as a pleasure, but as a matter of duty," his wife said, sorrowfully. "I am leaving my home, my friends, my happiness, my peace behind. My fate, my future, my life are in your hands. You are my husband, and I will do my duty, but the love I bore you you have frozen. You may thaw it again, may warm it into life once more, but at present it lies like a thing that is dead."

He was surprised and startled to hear her talk like this, and he replied,

"This is a strange way in which to meet your husband."

"It is," she said; "but our courting has been strange, our wedding was strange, and I fear our married life will be strange. Come, Isaac, I am ready to accompany you."

He fairly shuddered at her coldness, and truly he felt hurt. He was not prepared for this; it took him utterly and totally by surprise.

"I don't think you ought to treat me in such a manner," he remarked, in a confused way, and scarcely conscious of his words.

She smiled wearily as she answered,

"I am now what you have made me. But come, I beseech you, I want to get the wrench over."

She went out, and he followed her. Her boxes and packages had already been put on the gharry. Only one person stood at the door—an old, grey-haired native servant. She took his extended hand as she passed, and said in Hindustani, "Good-bye, Mahomet." Then with a sob she sighed, "Farewell."

"Allah bless you, and be with you always," he said, solemnly, as he kissed her hand.

She passed out into the dreamy sunshine, followed by her husband. They entered the gharry. Then she drew up the windows, and sinking back, pale and trembling, on the cushions, wept bitterly.

He attempted to put his arms round her neck. He wanted to kiss her and to soothe her; but she pushed him away, not roughly but gently; and in broken tones she murmured,

"Don't touch me yet, Isaac. Don't touch me. I wish to feel alone, to be alone, to weep alone."

From then up to the time they reached her new home no other word passed between them. But as soon as she was in the house she put her arms round his neck, and said,

"Kiss me, Isaac; kiss me for the first time in the home that is to be ours, and into which I pray God will bring peace and happiness."

In the course of a day or two Lena brightened up and began to display interest in her little household, and though she could not shake off the effects of the cruel disappointment she experienced in not being able to accompany Mrs. Gascoigne to England, she never reverted to the subject or mentioned the lady's name.

It was perhaps not exactly the kind of honeymoon she might have dreamed of, but still those early marriage days were not without a certain amount of pleasure and even happiness. Her husband was kind and attentive, and appeared to be proud of his young wife. On her part she did all that she could to make him comfortable, and if she experienced no great love for him she

certainly had affection, and that might in time have ripened into love, in spite of the feeling that she could never forgive him for what he had done. For the proverbial month, at any rate, it might be said that this ill-matched couple moved in an even tenour of way, and their domestic life was unruffled. But at the end of this period a little element of discord displayed itself. The discord came in the person of Mrs. Samuel Behrens. That estimable lady, in company with one of her daughters, arrived one morning about tiffin time. She had crossed the river in her husband's dingy, and had brought two of her male servants and her "lady's-maid" with her.

It is necessary to introduce this lady's-maid, as she figures in the subsequent record.

She was an American, by the name of Mary Dotbelle. At this time she would be about six-and twenty years of age. She was a tall, good-looking woman, with rather a demure, quiet manner.

She was a new-comer in Mrs. Behrens' service. That lady was not happy in her relations with her servants, and was frequently changing. Mary Dotbelle had been with her for about two months. She had come from America to India with a lady whose husband was the manager of a coffee plantation up the country, and she was going to join him. She sickened, however, and died within a month of landing, and Mary Dotbelle found herself out of a situation and in a foreign country. She was therefore very glad to take the first thing that offered; and that first thing was the lady's-maidship to the amiable Mrs. Behrens.

This was Miss Dotbelle's little history, so far as we are concerned with it, up to this point.

With her small retinue Mrs. Behrens moved her ponderous bulk up the garden path, and presented herself to Mrs. Luck, who had seen her coming, and the visit being so unexpected, as well as unwelcome, she became a little excited and flurried. When she went on to the verandah she was flushed and confused.

The lady had dropped into one of the large lounge chairs that are always an indispensable adjunct to an Indian bungalow. She was perspiring at every pore, and while one of her men-servants fanned her, Miss Dotbelle held a scent bottle under her nose. Her diamonds were very imposing, and every time she moved her

unwieldy body these jewels flashed in the sunlight with dazzling splendour. Her right arm, as far as the elbow, was covered with bangles, which clanked and jingled like a prisoner's chain every time she stirred the limb. Her left wrist was clasped by a very heavy, massive gold serpent, with carbuncle eyes and diamond scales.

The poor creature's heavy jewels and clothes must have been a sore tax for her to carry about in addition to the abnormal amount of adipose matter with which Nature had ladened her. But perhaps it would have been a sorer tax for her to have sacrificed all this lavish magnificence for the sake of easing the body. So long as her vanity was indulged, she didn't mind how much she mortified the flesh.

As poor, flushed and frightened little Lena came hurriedly on to the verandah the gorgeous creature put forth her beangled arm, making a tremendous silvery rattle in so doing. Lena, however, did not take the outstretched hand, but dropped timidly into a seat, and before she could make any remark the lady exclaimed effusively,

"My dear child, I *am* so glad to see you. This is the first opportunity I've had since you were married of coming to congratulate you."

Mrs. Luck did not say, "Oh, I am so glad to see you," as she was not a hypocrite, not even a conventional one. What she did say was this,

"I scarcely expected to have seen you here."

"No, dear, perhaps not," answered the lady, misinterpreting the remark; "you see I visit but very little indeed. For I am *such* an invalid."

She looked very lugubrious as she said this; but having said it she changed instantly to cheerfulness.

"Well, dear, I must say that married life seems to agree with you. I never saw you look so charming. There, Dotbelle, that will do," she said to her maid, as she pushed the scent bottle away. "Perhaps dear Mrs. Luck will allow you to take some of my things into the house."

The "things" consisted among others of a satchel, a spare fan, a lace shawl, a sunshade, a bonnet, and a little bag containing certain toilet mysteries.

"Oh yes, certainly," responded Mrs. Luck, jumping up. "I'll go and show the maid to my room."

"Don't put yourself to the slightest inconvenience, dear child," Mrs. Behrens remarked, considerately. "By the way, I should mention that Sam and your husband have gone out to Dum Dum. Sam said he had some business there, but I don't believe him. Men *are* such deceivers, you know. There's no believing anything they say. I am to remain here until they come back, when Sam will take me home."

Mrs. Luck was startled and turned red.

"I fear I shall be very poor company for you," she stammered. "It's a pity my husband did not tell me before he went out this morning."

"Well, dear, he didn't know, I suppose. But there, men are so deceitful I would not believe any of them. He called on Sam, and they arranged to drive out to Dum Dum, though what they've gone to do Heaven only knows. We poor women are so easily gulled. But now I do hope you will not go to the slightest trouble. I'm just going to take pot luck, as Sam says, and whatever you've got for tiffin will do for me."

Mrs. Luck felt disgusted and annoyed, and she certainly did not make any great effort to conceal it. She detested this vulgar woman, and had hoped that she would not be troubled with her.

"I was just thinking about tiffin as you came in," she said. "I will order it at once. Be kind enough to follow me"—this to the maid, and she hurriedly went into the house, glad to get a respite in order that she might recover from her confusion and annoyance. Lena was absent half an hour; then she sent the kitmurghar out to tell the lady that tiffin was served.

By the united efforts of her daughter, her two men-servants, and her maid-servant, Mrs. Behrens was enabled to get up from her chair. She could be active enough when she liked, but this was one of the occasions when she did not like, and she affected to be very languid. She succeeded in getting into the dining-room, followed by a little army of servants, and, again calling their services to her aid, she lowered herself into her seat. Then making a terrible jangle with her bangles, she waved her white hand as a sign that her domestic slaves could retire to a respectful distance.

The tiffin was a solemn affair. Poor little Lena felt under a shadow, and was frightened. The huge bulk of Mrs. Behrens seemed to press upon her. She experienced not only disgust, but loathing dislike and contempt for this woman, and that dislike was augmented when the lady asked unceremoniously,

“And how do you and Isaac get on, my dear?”

“We get on very well, indeed,” was the timid reply.

“I’m glad to hear it,” cried her guest, as she made a huge gap in a mango. “But you’ll have to look after him, you know, for he’s as mad as a March hare at times. A young woman needs to be taught how to rule her husband. I shall have to give you a wrinkle or two.”

Lena felt as if she would faint and drop off her chair; and as soon as ever the meal was over she excused herself on the plea of a violent headache, and went up to her room to have a good cry.

It was not until late that Mr. Behrens and her husband arrived. And when she went out to meet them she merely bowed stiffly to Mr. Behrens, although that gentleman put forth his hand. He gave no evidence of being annoyed by the snub, but poured out a perfect torrent of sickening adulation.

“I ran the old man over to Dum Dum,” he said, referring to her husband with vulgar familiarity, “to look at a horse a friend of mine has to sell. I recommend Isaac to buy it. It’s the best bit of cattle I’ve seen for many a long day.”

Mrs. Luck looked at her husband in surprise, and wondered how he could possibly contemplate buying a horse when their means were so limited. However, she made no remark.

“I should like to know, said Mrs. Behrens, chiming in; “I should like to know if that was all you went to Dum Dum for. I’ll be bound that you’ve been up to some mischief, if the truth were only known.”

“Look here, my dear, you shut up; and only speak when you’re spoken to.”

Her husband said this with mild savageness, and she obeyed him too, in spite of her statement that she kept him in order. The Behrens stayed to dinner, and after that played whist until eleven o’clock. Mrs. Luck was pressed to take a hand, but resolutely declined, and leaving the party to themselves she went on to

the verandah, glad to be alone with her own sad thoughts. But in a little while Mary Dotbelle came up and got into conversation, in the course of which Mary incidentally expressed contempt for her mistress. This was a note of sympathy between the two young women, and before they separated Mrs. Luck felt a feeling of friendship for Miss Dotbelle, who was intelligent and ladylike.

The visitors went away at last, and when they had gone, and Lena and her husband stood alone, she drew a sigh of relief, and throwing her arms round her husband's neck, exclaimed,

"O Isaac, I am so glad those dreadful people have gone. For my sake, dear, never ask them here again."

He repulsed her roughly as he answered,

"Look here, Lena, I don't know what you want to make yourself so disagreeable to my friends for. If you can afford to quarrel with them I can't. And the fact of the matter is, I shall ask them here just as often as I like. And the next time they come you'll oblige me by being a little less boorish."

If he had struck her she could not have felt more deeply wounded in spirit than she was by this coarse and brutal answer. She could make no reply to him. Her heart swelled up, she almost felt as if she were choking. And without another word she went silently and sorrowfully to bed.

From that night Isaac's conduct to his young wife changed, and if he did not treat her with absolute cruelty and neglect, he certainly was not kind to her.

And so the first year of their married life passed, and she became a mother, and in attending to her boy she found occupation for her mind and a new interest in life.

CHAPTER XXII.

HALF-A-MILLION OF MONEY.

FOR the first few weeks Isaac seemed to take a languid sort of interest in his son. The baby was duly christened Isaac, and gave promise of developing into a fine child. His father's interest, however, like his interest in everything else, was only evanescent, and he came in time to look upon his wife and child as rather a burden.

The only visitors who ever came to the house were the Behrens. Sometimes the husband and wife came together. Sometimes the one came without the other; in fact, this was the case more often than not. Lena suffered in mind through these visits more than could be described. She thoroughly detested the visitors, and yet she did try very hard indeed for Isaac's sake to be agreeable to them, but it was a trial that she alone knew the cost of, for it did cost her a good deal. It seemed to be a sacrifice of all her womanly pride, her independence, her dignity; but she made the sacrifice rather than quarrel with her husband.

In spite of the vulgarity and natural coarseness of Mrs. Behrens, Lena could have tolerated her, for after all the woman was not a badly disposed woman, and there was a good deal of kindly feeling in her. But Behrens himself filled the unhappy girl with horror and alarm. She never could, under any circumstances, bring herself to look upon him with anything even approaching respect. His leering glances, his fulsome flattery, his strained efforts to appear to her polished and polite, caused her to dread him. She hated him so, because she felt confident that he led her husband astray; but Isaac appeared to be fascinated with him, and never would admit that there was anything objectionable about Behrens.

It chanced one day that Isaac went down the river with one of the ships that was going away, as he had some settlements to make with the captain respecting the cargo, and before going out in the morning he announced to his wife that he should sleep on board that night, and return home the following night, as it was not possible to get back before.

In the course of that afternoon she was sitting working at some child's clothes on the verandah. Her baby then was about four months old, and was in charge of its ayah, who had taken it out. Suddenly she was startled—startled to such an extent that she almost screamed as she saw her enemy Behrens coming up the pathway. His shining face wore its usual smirking smile, and as he approached he removed his hat and bowed.

"I hope I find you well to-day," he said; "I had some business over this side, and I felt I could not pass without dropping in to have a peep at you. You are looking charming at any rate. And how is the chicken? I don't see him about."

"Mr. Behrens," she said, angrily, "you have no business to come here in my husband's absence. I beg that you will leave me immediately."

She rose with the intention of going, when he answered,

"Really, Mrs. Luck, this is a rudeness on your part that nothing I have ever done can justify."

"I don't know that I could be rude to you even if I tried, because I dislike you too much."

"Well, you are honest about it, anyway," he said, sharply.

"Yes; I have always tried to be honest in speech and action all my life. But I have no wish to bandy words with you. I must request you to leave."

"You forget," he answered, "that I am your husband's friend, and I have a right to expect courtesy at his wife's hands."

"You are no friend of my husband's," she exclaimed, with great warmth, "and in saying what you have done you have given me the opportunity to tell you this. So far from being his friend, you are his enemy; for no one can be a friend to a young man who leads him astray, and weans him from his wife and child."

"You are making a heavy charge. Where are your proofs?"

"My proofs are my own common-sense—my own instincts."

"Not very substantial proofs, at any rate, for so severe an accusation."

"To my mind they are ample."

"If you cannot be respectful you might at least be grateful," he said.

"Grateful," she exclaimed, "I have yet to learn that you have ever done anything to earn my gratitude."

"You seem to forget that I was a friend of your uncle's, and helped him out of many a difficulty."

"It is false," she cried, with great indignation. "You were no friend of my uncle, and if he thought so it was because you had managed to infatuate him as you have infatuated my unfortunate husband."

"Well, my dear Mrs. Luck," he said, changing his tone to a more conciliatory one, "one cannot take the spots off a leopard, and one cannot get an idea out of a woman's head when once it has taken root. I was a friend of your uncle. At his death I tried to be a friend to you."

She curled her lip in scorn, and flashing an angry look at him, she said, interrupting him,

"Do not talk to me of having tried to be a friend to me. A friend indeed! A woman had infinitely better have you as an enemy than a friend. Your friendship is a thing to be avoided."

"Oh, indeed. That's your opinion, is it? But come, do not let us quarrel. I came in to have a pleasant little chat; and here I find you as unsociable as a bear with a swarm of bees round its head."

"Again, Mr. Behrens, I ask you to leave me," she said, very determinedly. "My husband is away, and you are taking a mean advantage of his absence to insult me."

"Tut, my dear, you are talking nonsense. The insulting part is all on your side."

"You are a coward," she exclaimed, wrathfully, and attempting to pass him to go into the house, but he laid his hand on her arm.

"Stay," he said; "I have something to say."

She jerked her arm free from him, and, looking at him with angry eyes, exclaimed,

"What you have to say, then, say quickly, because I refuse to remain in your presence any longer."

"Really," he remarked, "you are delightful and beautiful, even in your wrath."

"You beast?" she hissed.

"My dear, my dear, don't use such strong language," he said, sidling towards her, but she drew away and cried,

"If you come another step nearer I'll call my servants to my protection. Are you mad or intoxicated?"

"Neither, unless I am intoxicated with your beauty."

She shuddered and shrank from him as she said with bursting heart,

"Oh that my husband were here to horsewhip you!"

Behrens sneered, and then with a cold, cynical laugh he replied,

"Do you suppose that your husband would really do that? If you do, you must have curious notions about him. But why are you so angry with me?"

"Because I detest you, as I said before."

"And as I said before, you should be grateful."

"Thank Heaven, I am not beholden to you for anything," she cried.

"So that's your notion, is it? What will you say if I tell you you are beholden to me for everything you have. You were married with my money, the furniture in your house was bought with my money, you have been kept with my money."

She was deadly pale and trembling with excitement. She almost felt that if she had had a knife in her hand at that moment she could have plunged it into him with the most perfect *sang froid*.

"Oh, you wretch," she cried, "you, you—"

She broke down and could say no more, but sweeping past him left him standing there alone. But then her feelings of indignation and wounded pride got the better of her judgment and discretion, and she rushed back to the verandah where he still stood.

"I don't believe what you have told me," she exclaimed, trembling with excitement: "it is impossible that my husband could have deceived me in such a manner."

"Is it?" Behrens answered, coolly. "You don't know half yet of what your husband is capable of."

"You coward!" she hissed; "you poltroon, to insult a defenceless woman in such a way."

"Look here, my dear Mrs. Luck."

"Don't call me your dear Mrs. Luck," she cried, as she stamped her foot with passion.

"Well, then, Mrs. Luck, without the dear. You say that I have insulted you. If I have I have done it without intention, and am sorry for it. But you seem to forget how often you have insulted me. You did nothing but abuse me over your uncle's affairs; and now that I have been a good friend to your husband, you are even more abusive."

"A friend to my husband!" she said, with withering contempt, "a friend to my husband! All I've got to say then is, that I pray God to save my husband from such friends as you. But, leave me. You have no business here, and I decline to hold further conversation with you."

Again she went into the house. He was astonished at her display of temper. He had always believed that she was too mild to show so much spirit. He stood for some minutes as if irresolute as to the course to take. At last he shrugged his shoulders and muttered,

"Very good, madam, you have broken into open quarrel with me. So be it. However, it's a whirligig life this, and some day perhaps you will be suing to me. Who knows?"

Then he went away, much to poor Lena's great relief. When her husband came home she told him all that had happened. He seemed annoyed, but he did not say much.

"Isaac, you must stop that man from coming here, unless you wish to kill me," she said.

"I think," he answered, "I think you are rather stupidly prejudiced against Behrens. It has always seemed to me so. He may not be very polished, but he is not half a bad fellow. At any rate, he has been a friend to me, and I don't see why I should be rude to him."

Lena looked at her husband with pity and contempt. She had never experienced contempt for him before, but now she could not help it. She expected that he, as her husband, would at least have protected her from insult, but he seemed quite indisposed to do that.

It was a terrible disillusionising for her. She had once thought this man a hero, now she was afraid to let her thoughts shape what she deemed him. It was a bitter awakening from her dream; a terrible undoing of what she had done.

It was easy to say that she had no one else but herself to blame. After all, that is but a cant phrase. She was a woman, and trusted and loved, and it was a cruel, wicked, shameful thing that that trust and love should be so abused. She had given her heart to the man, and he was a coward for not honouring the gift.

Although she was sorely wounded, and her womanly pride revolted against this outrage upon it, she struggled to keep herself calm before him, and she answered him thus :

"Isaac, I do not think Mr. Behrens could possibly be a good friend to anyone; but this thing is certain, if he is a good friend to you he is a very bad enemy to me, and the two positions cannot be reconciled. As your wife I have a right to demand to be protected from the odious annoyances of such a man, and if you refuse me that protection I shall make a rule of always going out when he comes."

"You can go out and stop out altogether," her husband said, angrily.

"If I thought that you meant that you should not tell me so twice," she answered, firmly.

"Pray don't labour under any wrong impression," he returned, with a cold sneer. *I do* mean it."

"Isaac!" she gasped.

"Oh, don't look so astonished. I've done the best I could for you, and you are not satisfied. You can therefore scarcely wonder at my being tired."

"You speak falsely, Isaac, when you say I am not satisfied," she returned with warmth. "Have I ever said a single word to you that is capable of being construed into dissatisfaction?"

"Well, if you have not said it you have expressed it silently," he answered.

"You tell a lie, sir," she cried, unable longer to control her temper. "I have been a good, and faithful, and dutiful wife to you, and have never for an instant felt the remotest dissatisfaction with anything you've done. But I have a right to ask to have my wishes consulted, it is a reasonable request."

"When you make a reasonable request," he said.

"Have I made an unreasonable one, then?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"You ask me to quarrel with Mr. Behrens, and I won't do it."

"I ask nothing of the kind. From a business point of view it would not be policy for you to quarrel with him, but you will be quite within your rights in telling him that he must respect your house and your wife."

"Look here, Lena, the whole fact of the matter is this," he said, bitterly, "as we cannot live happily together, it is better for both of us that we part."

She felt as if she were sinking down into the earth, and that her hold on life was slackening. Considering what she had sacrificed for his sake it was base and cowardly of him to thus destroy every hope of her life.

"Do you mean what you say?" she asked, with difficulty, while a mist swam before her eyes.

"Yes, I do," he answered.

She could say no more. She felt as if she was choking. She went out of the room as if she were a woman walking in a dream. She went in search of her baby and found him, and hugged him passionately to her breast, that she might assure herself that she was not quite alone in the world.

Some silent and bitter days passed after this, silent in the sense that her husband was sullen and morose. He absented himself much from his home, and she saw little of him. She had led such a secluded life since her marriage that she had made no acquaintances, so that she had no one to appeal to, no one to go to.

It was about a fortnight after this that Mrs. Behrens paid her another visit. Lena was not altogether sorry because Miss Dotbelle came also, as she always did, and the young wife had grown to like this young woman. It happened in the course of the visit that Mary Dotbelle and Lena got talking about their little troubles as women who have some sympathy in common will talk. Mary was very dissatisfied with her situation, and expressed a wish that she could better herself, and incidentally she alluded to Mr. Behrens in a manner that was not at all complimentary to that gentleman.

This led to Lena giving her opinion, and subsequently to her detailing the scene she had had with him; and then as she yearned more and more for a confidante she could not resist at last alluding to her quarrel with her husband, and the suggestion he had made. Miss Dotbelle expressed not only sorrow but indignation, and she said,

"Well, if I were you I would take him at his word. No man should trample on me in that way."

"But you forget I have my child's future to study."

"Then you could not study his future better than by removing him from his father's influence," Mary answered, boldly.

That remark found an echo in Mrs. Luck's heart, and for days she dwelt upon the idea. The more she turned it over in her mind the more it seemed to present itself to her as a duty. Her husband had grown more and more neglectful, while as for his child he scarcely ever noticed him, and if he did it was only to display some irritability of temper. As a wife Lena might have endured his coldness, as a mother she could not; and when her patience and endurance had reached their limit she said one day,

"It is evident, Isaac, that your love for me is dead. Let us part, by all means, if you think it will add to your happiness."

"I don't know that it will add to my happiness," he answered, showing more feeling than he had done for a long time, "but I will be candid with you. The fact is, I am in difficulties about money, and it will be decidedly to our mutual interests that for a time I lessen my expenses. I propose, therefore, to give up the house and take apartments for you in Calcutta. I can always find accommodation for myself on board one or other of the firm's ships, so that by this arrangement I can reduce our expenses to at least one-half of what they are now. Our separation need only be temporary. When I have got on my feet again, we'll take another house somewhere. In fact, I have a notion of writing to old Greth and asking him to let me go home, and if he consents we can settle down in Liverpool."

The result of this conversation was, that in two months from that time the house was given up, and Lena went to live in apartments in a respectable boarding-house that was frequented a good deal by officers and captains of ships. Here her husband provided

her with three rooms and a native nurse for the child, and a companionship and friendship springing up between her and Mary Dotbelle, that young woman became a constant visitor at the house, though Lena very seldom saw her husband. Whatever Isaac's motives were that induced him to separate from his wife, it is certain that the ones he had stated were not the true ones, because he plunged into a more reckless course of living, and his expenses, instead of decreasing, must have increased.

During all the time he had been abroad he had never once received a letter from Mr. Greth. He got one or more letters by every mail, but they were always business communications from the firm, but when his son was about a year old a letter came to Isaac one day, addressed in Mr. Greth's own handwriting. It was in the old man's characteristic style, and its contents almost stunned Isaac with surprise. This was the letter :—

“A serious attack of illness, which has seemed to me like the rap of Death at my life's door, has determined me in no longer delaying what has been on my mind for a long time. When I took you into my business it was with an ulterior and far-seeing motive. When I sent you to India it was in the hope of making you into a sound business man, of improving your knowledge of the world in order that a dream of my life might be realised, and when my time came to lay down the reins that I have held for so many years, you might worthily take them up. I begin to fear that I have made an error. The reports that have reached me from time to time of your conduct have given me pain, but I would fain believe that your follies have been those of an ill-trained youth, and that with your advancing years wisdom may come. My wish now is that you should return home without loss of time. And though I pray that I may be spared to see you again, the state of my health gives me ground for believing that God will will it otherwise. I am desirous, therefore, of telling you from my own lips that I have appointed you my heir, and that on my death you will become possessed of property representing at least half-a-million sterling. There is an irrevocable condition, however, attached to this, which is, that you take as your wife Marguerite, the only daughter of my brother Jacob. She has no beauty, but she has the most perfect sweetness and amiability of temper, and a woman who brings to

her husband a dowry of half-a-million may be tolerated, no matter what her physical defects are. Should I not survive until you reach England you will find in the hands of my lawyers a document specially addressed to you, in which I have laid down rules for your guidance in the future, not only as to your personal conduct, but for the carrying on of the business.

“ISAAC GRETH.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

“A GRINNING ‘SPECTRE’ SEEMED TO SIT BEFORE HIM.”

ISAAC read the letter in blank amazement, and with his heart hammering at his ribs, and the blood surging up into his face and hissing in his ears.

“It wasn’t true. It couldn’t be. It was a delusion, a snare, a trap to lead him into madness.”

He read it again. There was no mistaking the handwriting. There it was, and there was Isaac Greth’s signature. He knew it well. *That* wasn’t a delusion. The “Old Man,” as he had always disrespectfully called him, had written him a letter telling him he was his heir. The man whom he had never liked, whom he had snubbed, whose advice he had disregarded, put into his way a fortune of half-a-million.

“Was the old man mad?”

The hypothesis was not tenable for a moment ; because now, when his conduct in the past was reviewed by the light of this letter, it was most clear that everything he had done had been consistent with this ulterior object.

Then Luck was aghast at his own amazing folly. He pressed his hand to his throbbing temple like a dazed man. He reeled, fell into a chair, and groaned,

“Half-a-million of money !”

Between him and that enormous sum only a wife whom he did not love.

A partnership in the great firm of Greth Brothers, shipowners!

Between him and that partnership only a wife, whom now he *felt that he hated*.

Nemesis had struck, and struck hard. For years he had been walking with a thick bandage of folly over his eyes. Now this

bandage was suddenly rent away, and his eyes were dazzled by the effulgence of half-a-million of money. But between him and it was a gulf—narrow, it was true—but he could not bridge it.

From the moment that he finished reading that letter he was a changed man. His youth seemed to leave him like magic. He was grave and sober.

For days he carried his secret in his breast, and the "old man's letter" seemed to press him down as if it had been the half-million in specie.

All day long he was haunted by that half-million, and all night he tossed in feverish restlessness, and a voice cried in his ears,

"Half-a-million, half-a-million."

In his delirious excitement a grinning spectre seemed to sit before him, and to cry derisively,

"Aha! half-a-million of money. But you can't touch it."

At last the secret became too heavy for Luck to bear. He felt as if he would go mad if he did not take some one into his confidence; and who was there he could take if it were not his friend Behrens?

He presented himself before Behrens that night—pale, trembling, excited.

"Hullo! dear boy. What's the matter with you?"

"Behrens, I want to be alone with you for a time. Come, let us shut ourselves in somewhere."

They shut themselves in Mr. Behrens' snuggery, which was sacred to himself. He sometimes jocosely called it his "Plot-hatching Den," because it was there he transacted his private business. It was by no means an inappropriate name.

"Well, old fellow, what's your trouble? Have you been over-running the constable?"

Luck's lips trembled. He was white to chalkiness. He could not speak, but pressed his hands hard to his burning head and paced up and down.

"Here, have some brandy pawnee, my boy. That will steady you."

Luck drank the brandy without the pawnee. Then, with quivering fingers, he took from his pocket-book the "old man's letter."

"Read that."

Behrens put on his glasses, for he couldn't read by lamplight without them.

In two minutes or less his massive, oleaginous face changed colours like a dying chameleon. His eyes glistened like two beads. His mouth worked nervously. Then, drumming on his desk with his podgy fingers, he sat and stared at his dear friend, who, sitting in a chair, was holding his head like a man distraught.

"Is this a joke?" asked Behrens, in a deep, hollow, almost sepulchral voice.

"Yes, a joke of the devil's," groaned Luck.

Mr. Behrens helped himself largely to brandy, forgetting the pawnee. He gulped it down like a pill, and his face became fiery. He gasped,

"Half-a-million of money!"

There was silence then, save for the snorting of Behrens and the almost stertorous breathing of Luck. At last Behrens broke the silence by banging his heavy hand on to his desk.

"Half-a-million," he repeated; "by heaven, it's worth murdering a woman for."

Luck jumped as if the heavy hand had struck him instead of the desk.

"For God's sake, Behrens, don't talk like that," he said, in a hoarse, raspy voice.

"Half-a-million!" Mr. Behrens repeated for a third time, but this time musingly, as if dreaming it over; and he smacked his lips and rolled his tongue about as if swallowing a *bonne bouche*.

Then a long blank ensued in the conversation. Each felt, instinctively, that it was not a time for talking but thinking.

Behrens helped himself to more brandy mechanically. And he sat with his elbows resting on the desk, his chin on his hands, and his beady eyes fixed on the letter that lay before him. He read it over and over, and over again, until he must have known it by heart.

At last he uttered a jerky sigh, folded the letter up, and handed it back to his companion.

"Put it in your pocket," he said. "Look here, have you mentioned this to anyone else?"

"Not a living soul."

"Whatever you do, keep it to yourself; and, above all, don't let the women know it. The woman is not born who can keep a secret. Does anyone in England know of your marriage?"

"I should say not. In fact, I am sure of it. I've never mentioned it, and Lena has no friends there to write to."

Mr. Behrens stood for a few moments in an attitude of profound meditation. He might have been a seer peering into futurity.

"Bah, what fools we have been!" he exclaimed, with a great puffing out of his breath that caused the lamp flame to leap up. Why he spoke in the plural is not very clear. Possibly he imagined that he had a sort of partnership in that half-million. "Come, let's go and do a cigar and a turn in the grounds. It's hot here."

It *was* hot. Mr. Behrens' face showed that he was hot, at any rate. It had the appearance of having been smeared with dripping.

As the two men went thoughtfully down the grand staircase and into the hall they ran against Mrs. Behrens.

"O Sam, I've been looking everywhere for you," cried the lady. "I want you and Luck to come and have a hand at whist."

"Damn your whist," answered Mr. Behrens, no doubt thinking that to go and play whist with half-a-million of money ringing through his brain was the concentrated essence of absurdity.

"Well, you're in a pretty mood, I must say," answered Mrs. Behrens, with an angry rattle of her bangles and an indignant toss of her head.

"Go to the devil," replied her lord and master, with great amiability; and then he himself went into the verandah, followed by Luck.

"It strikes me very forcibly you'll go to him before I do," retorted the good lady, fiercely, swelling her bosom out like an enraged swan, and tossing her head again so vigorously that she jerked her back comb out. The lord and master, however, was beyond the range of her voice, and did not hear her. He took from his cigar case two Manilla cheroots, handed one to Luck, lit the other himself, and still under the influence of that prospective half-million, he put the lighted end of his cigar into his mouth.

For a moment he seemed surrounded with a fountain of sparks that illumined the darkness of the night, and spluttering, snorting,

squirming, and screaming, Mr. Behrens twisted about like a pinned cockchafer. And he swore. Mr. Behrens could swear when he liked.

Luck laughed. It was perhaps uncharitable, but it was impossible to help it.

Attracted by the noise, Mrs. Behrens waddled out to see what was the matter, and she saw the matter in the shape of her husband squirling about and pressing his silk handkerchief to his burnt lips. Some of the sparks were still glowing on his clothes, and the wife of his bosom realised in an instant the state of things.

She rejoiced, but she did not say so.

She whipped out her own gauzy little handkerchief, and with marvellous agility rushed to him, and commenced to whisk the sparks off him.

"Sammy, dear, whatever have you done?"

"Get me some iced water," he roared, "and don't jump about there flapping me as though you thought I was a mosquito."

The iced water by itself had an emollient effect on the burn, and some iced water and brandy in combination had an equally emollient effect on Mr. Behrens' ruffled temper, so that in a little time he lit up another cigar, but on this occasion did *not* put the burning end to his lips.

For quite half-an-hour he and his friend strolled about the grounds without speaking. At the expiration of that time Mr. Behrens flung the stump of his cigar away with a savage jerk, and his right clenched fist he banged into his left open palm with a sounding smack, and with vigorous emphasis he exclaimed,

"Good Lord, what asses we've been!"

He still spoke in the plural.

That they *were* asses no one perhaps would have been inclined to gainsay; but the process of reasoning whereby Mr. Behrens arrived at that conclusion was not very sound logic.

"Well, the mischief's done and can't be undone," Luck replied, with a groan of despair.

The worthy Behrens stood and looked at him, not that he could see his face clearly, for there was no moon, and brilliant as those Indian stars were they did not afford sufficient light to distinguish the workings of the human countenance. But Mr. Behrens did

not search his companion's face ; he was only thinking, and under circumstances of this kind a man frequently stops when an idea strikes him.

You have often, no doubt, seen two men, when walking in the street engaged in conversation suddenly stop and look at each other, arrested by a point in the argument. Women don't do this. Men do. Why the peculiarity should be confined to the masculine gender we cannot discuss here, though it is almost worth an essay.

That some idea had struck Mr. Behrens was evidenced by his next remark.

“What do you mean, old fellow, when you say the mischief cannot be undone? I've some sort of notion that half-a-million of money is powerful enough to undo almost any mischief that ever was done. However, I may be mistaken.”

“How am I going to undo it?” asked Luck, snappishly. It was that snappishness that one sometimes shows at a seemingly absurd or impossible suggestion.

“Look here, dear boy,” said Mr. Behrens, as he put one of his hands on each of his companion's shoulders. This was another peculiar habit of his when he wanted to be very impressive. “Look here, dear boy ; if I were a young man with a young wife and a baby child, and they stood in the way of my touching a half-million of money, I think I should have that half-million. Half-a-million ! Only fancy ! *Half-a-million*. Five hundred thousand pounds ! Why, a fellow can't realise it. If I were to take and turn every mortal bit of property I've got in the world into solid hard cash I shouldn't reach one-fifth of that amount, and yet people think I'm rich.”

“How would you get it?” asked Isaac. “Old Greth says distinctly that it depends on my marrying his niece. I remember that girl perfectly well. She was as ugly as sin, and a cripple. And I also remember now, when it's too late, how he used to ask me if I liked her. When Mr. Greth has made up his mind to a thing you might just as well try and fly as to alter his plans.”

“And yet I would have that half-million, to say nothing of the partnership,” answered Behrens.

“Well, why don't you tell me how you would get it?” This peevisishly.

"I don't know, but still I would get it."

"I'll be hanged if I see how I'm to get it, then," exclaimed Isaac, growing more irritable, "unless I go and blow my wife's brains out and strangle the youngster."

"It's quite certain, dear boy, you wouldn't get it that way, because you would be hanged," answered Behrens, with provoking coolness.

"Then what is the use of your talking such nonsense? I've been cursed fool enough to ruin myself, and I must grin and bear it."

Mr. Behrens took out his cigar case, and offering his companion a cigar, said,

"Have another smoke. You should bear in mind, my good friend, great questions of this kind cannot be discussed heatedly. They want a lot of thinking out. You have an immense interest at stake, and it's worth while to beat about for some means whereby you can secure your interests. As I tell you, if *I* were in your position I would find the means."

"Well, I confess, then, you are cleverer than I am. There is only the way I speak of that I know of, and I am not such a fool as to go and put my neck in a noose, even for half-a-million of money."

The two men relapsed into silence again. They walked about and smoked, until Behrens exclaimed,

"What do you say if we go in and have a rubber with the missus and the girls?"

Isaac said "yes," but it was more for the sake of distracting his thoughts.

Mrs. Behrens was very fond of playing whist. It was the only game she could play. Her sons were seldom at home at night, and very frequently the girls preferred to play the piano, or sketch, or do any fancy work, for they had been brought up with rather genteel notions. And, as we have before observed, the Behrens did not keep much, if any, company. He found his company out of doors, and she had few acquaintances. She was very glad, therefore, when she could get her husband and Isaac to join in a rubber. In the present instance the game was a very dreary affair. Although a good player, Isaac was constantly trumping his partner's

tricks, or throwing away. But his thoughts were not with the cards. They were with that half-million of money.

"Whatever is the matter with you to-night, Isaac!" Mrs. Behrens exclaimed at last; "you look as though you had tumbled into a fortune, and were worried about it."

Isaac started, and Behrens looked in astonishment at his wife, but she was all unconscious of the effect of her words. It was strange she should have made such a remark, but after all it was a mere coincidence.

"I'm not very well," he answered, scarcely knowing what excuse to make.

"I am sorry to hear that," she said, sympathetically. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes," chimed in Behrens, answering for him. "You can—you can hold your noise."

Mrs. Behrens scowled. She was always afraid to go beyond scowling.

"Look here, dear boy, you had better let me put you up for to-night," addressing himself to Isaac now. "You can have your usual room; and we'll do a quiet cigar in my den before going to roost. What do you say?"

"I shall be very glad."

And so they adjourned to the den once more, much to the good lady's disgust, for she liked Isaac's company, and would have much preferred that he would have stayed and played cards with her. However, her husband had spoken the word, and she dare not go against that.

Isaac Luck was evidently in great distress of mind, and several times he took Mr. Greth's letter out and re-read it, as though he had still some idea that he was being hoaxed. But there were the words,

"I have appointed you my heir, and that on my death you will become possessed of property representing at least half-a-million sterling. There is an irrevocable condition, however, attached to this, which is, that you take as your wife Marguerite, the only daughter of my brother Jacob."

Mr. Greth's writing was like himself—a little formal, precise, steady, pronounced. It was a characteristic hand, and once seen it might have been picked out from ten thousand other specimens,

while his signature seemed like the mint stamp of the man's mind. It was singular ; some people might have pronounced it eccentric, but it was evidently the signature of a man who moved in a groove of his own, and stood outside of the great flock of human sheep, where all are so much alike that it is difficult to tell one from the other. To have forged this signature would have been a work of great difficulty, if not an impossibility. Isaac knew the writing and signature well. There was no mistaking them ; and the announcement was a mocking reality. The fortune was there, but he could not touch it, and henceforth he must live a Tantalus sort of life. It may easily be supposed that Mr. Samuel Behrens also suffered something of the torture that affected his young friend. Mr. Behrens was an exceedingly selfish man ; and was as utterly incapable of doing a spontaneous act of generosity as he was of leaping up to the moon. To him there was one thing in the world worth living for, and one thing only. That one thing was money. He was fond of saying,

"I can get everything else I want if I have money. If I have no money, I am nobody and nothing."

Of course, in regretting the circumstances that placed a barrier between his friend and the realisation of the great fortune that lay before him, Mr. Behrens did so from purely self-interested motives ; for he thought that somehow—how he did not stop to inquire then—that he would benefit indirectly, if not directly himself, should Isaac come into possession. Therefore Mr. Behrens considered that he was a personal loser, and that was a source of great grief to him. To gratify his vanity ; to see his wife covered with diamonds, or to be the possessor of the most superb carriage and best horses in the town, he would cheerfully have spent thousands ; but for the sake of a five-pound note he would have quarrelled with his own mother. Herein of course he displayed all the characteristics of a vulgarly vain and unprincipled man. To have a grand house and grand furniture, pictures and plate, servants and horses—these were the aim of Mr. Behrens' labours. It mattered not that no one came to his house, or saw his pictures—that was nothing from his point of view. As long as he possessed them that was enough. Consequently, he was always spending much money, and also making much money, but he did not make it fast enough for his own

gratification, and that was a constant source of worry, pain, grief, and annoyance to him. It was the canker at his heart; it was an open sore that would not heal. If he could only have satisfied that craving, then he might have been a happy man. But it was impossible to satisfy it, and so he would have to suffer until the span of his years was reached; and in that supreme moment he would find, no doubt as others have found before him, that when the last scene of the drama called Life was being played out, it would be worth untold millions to prolong the play, even for so brief a space as a little year. But such men as Mr. Behrens never look to the end. To them all men are mortal but themselves. Death may strike whom he likes, but he must not, and won't, and can't strike them.

We have thus tried to depict Mr. Behrens' character, so that the reader may thoroughly understand the man. He was one of a type, alas, only too common, and in sketching him we have tried to avoid anything like exaggeration.

"I tell you what it is, friend Isaac," he said, solemnly, as the two sat brooding in the den, "some plan will have to be thought out for your getting this fortune."

"Well, Behrens," answered friend Isaac, with a bitter, cynical, despairing smile, "if you can think out any plan I shall be delighted; but I can't, unless I commit murder, and I'm not going to do that."

"Supposing now," continued Behrens, without noticing the remark, and speaking gravely and thoughtfully as though he were an oracle pronouncing the fate of a nation, "supposing now I *could* work out some plan for you and place you in the unreserved possession of this half-million of money, and the partnership in the great business, what should you consider my services were worth?"

Isaac gave vent to an expression of incredulity of the thing being possible.

"Worth! why, I should say almost anything," he answered.

"Fifty thousand pounds, a hundred thousand pounds!" exclaimed Behrens, quickly, and with some suppressed excitement, as though he already saw his way clear to realising his hopes.

"I would gladly give fifty thousand out of my fortune," said

Isaac, "because one had better lose fifty thousand than five hundred thousand."

"Wouldn't you make it a hundred thousand?" said Behrens, still excited.

"Yes, I should be only too glad."

"Then I'll do it," and he emphasised his statement by knocking his fist on the table.

"How?"

"Never mind how—I'll do it."

"Mind you, I would never countenance any harm being done to Lena and the youngster," returned Isaac, looking very pale and frightened.

"I will do no harm to them, and nobody else shall with my sanction," answered Behrens; "but under such circumstances as these, and in a country like this, there are more ways than one of getting a wife and child, whom it is inconvenient to own, out of the way. What is wanted is that this marriage of yours should be kept a secret, and that your wife should be placed somewhere where she cannot be troublesome, and yet may have all she wants and be comfortable. If you mean to tell me that a plan like this cannot be worked out, then I shall say money has lost its power, and I've no brains. You give me a bond for a hundred thousand pounds, and make it a first charge upon your estate, and I'll undertake to place you in possession."

Isaac was still incredulous, and he smiled as though he took little interest in the matter, but he made answer,

"You shall have the hundred thousand if you do this."

"Good. Let's go to bed now. We'll talk the matter over again to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXIV

"I HAVE NEVER BEEN TROUBLED WITH A THING CALLED A HEART,
AND AM AS HARD AS FLINT."

M R. BEHRENS did not sleep that night, or at any rate only by brief snatches. He had a most active brain, and a strong, robust constitution, and he was capable of enduring a great deal of mental and physical strain. The more he dwelt upon the matter of the fortune, the more he assured himself that he must have a hand in it. At any rate, he had everything to gain, and little to risk. He was too 'cute to risk much, but in the present case he was by no means disinclined to venture something, even to the extent of a thousand pounds or two, and he was quite aware that that much at least would have to be risked if he succeeded in carrying out to a successful issue a scheme which, as yet shadowy in his brain, was becoming more and more defined every hour.

In dwelling upon this gentleman's characteristics we have perhaps failed to sufficiently emphasise the fact that he was an extremely spiteful man, and in such a person spite was allied to cruelty. Now he had for a long time felt extremely spiteful against Lena, for no other reason than that he had failed to ingratiate himself in her favour. She had persistently snubbed him; and as he had a very low opinion of women in general, he considered that her "freezing and lofty virtue," as he had been pleased to designate it, ought to be broken. He had a very lively recollection of the scene on the occasion of his last visit to her, when she had morally lashed him, and he had said to himself,

"You have broken into open quarrel with me. So be it. However, it's a whirligig life this, and some day perhaps you will be suing to me. Who knows?"

As he sat now in these quiet night-hours weaving schemes, it

seemed to him that the "whirligig" was likely to bring him his revenge sooner than he had dreamed of. The view he took of Lena was the vulpine one of the impossible grapes; and as the fox hated the grapes because they were beyond his reach, so he hated Lena for no other reason than that she stood on a pedestal far removed above the influences of his wicked wiles.

He knew perfectly well that given the money and the necessary daring, that a woman and child might be got out of the way. It is true that a great deal of very elaborate plotting might have to be gone through; but Mr. Behrens firmly believed, and perhaps he was not far wrong, that he had the nerve and the brain requisite for this plotting, and a man will do a great deal for such a sum as a hundred thousand pounds.

When Mr. Behrens and his guest met in the morning, Behrens looked by far the fresher of the two, although he had not slept for a full hour, while Isaac had passed a fairly good night. But his face wore that haggard appearance which a man has when he has gone through a great deal of intense mental worry.

"What's your idea on the subject this morning?" asked Mr. Behrens, as he drove his friend down to a ghat on the river, where a ship he was unloading was lying; and by the "subject" meaning, of course, what they had been discussing the previous evening.

"I have no idea," answered Isaac, a little gloomily.

"But have you thought of nothing?" pursued Behrens, anxious to fathom Isaac's mind to the fullest possible extent.

"No."

"Surely you might make a suggestion?"

"How the deuce can I make a suggestion, Behrens?" exclaimed Isaac, with petulance. "I know of no possible way of releasing myself from the responsibilities of my idiotic marriage, unless it be by knocking my wife on the head, or cutting her throat, or something like that; and however bad I may be, I'm not bad enough for that sort of thing."

"Well, it wouldn't be pleasant," Behrens remarked, coolly.

"No, I should think not. I wish to heaven old Greth had died before he could have made his will, or written to me, or anything else. I should never have known then what an unmitigated ass I am."

"Don't be so severe on yourself, dear boy!"

"Severe! I feel as though I should like to go and jowl my head against a wall until my brains fell out."

"That might be a difficult operation," said Behrens, with a laugh; "because from the way you are talking now I should say you had no brains to fall out. A man who has five hundred thousand pounds and a partnership in a great business placed within his reach would be a fool not to make an effort to secure them."

"What effort can I make?"

"As you haven't the energy to do it yourself, I'll do it for you," answered Behrens. "Of course you'll go to England."

"Upon my word I don't think I shall."

"Now, look here, my young friend, if you do not wish me to despise you altogether just talk some common-sense. You *will* go to England, and, what is more, you'll get the old man's money, a fifth of which will come to me. Now let us stare the matter seriously in the face, for after all it's a thing that must be dealt with seriously. The stakes are far too large to be thrown away without the most desperate efforts to secure them. It amounts to this: are you willing to place the affair in my hands, and be guided entirely by me?"

"Well—yes," answered Isaac, thoughtfully. Then after a pause he added, "I make a reservation, however."

"What is the reservation?"

"I'll tell you directly when you have sketched out your plan."

"I have no plan to sketch out."

"Surely you must have something in your mind."

"Nothing definite enough to put into words. But if I set to work I'll guarantee that I hit upon a plan."

"Well, I have this to say, Behrens, I'll countenance nothing that does not spare the lives of Lena and her child."

"I'll bind myself not to injure a hair of their heads," Behrens answered. "Does that satisfy you?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll go to England?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"As soon as ever I can get my affairs here squared up."

"You'll go home overland, I suppose?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Would you propose to see your wife before you leave?"

This question caused Isaac some qualms of conscience. He was going away, and though she was his lawful wife there was a strong probability that he would never meet this unfortunate woman again on earth. And yet, at one time she was his little playmate, his daisy-crowned queen, his child-sweetheart, his boyhood's dream. And now not her beauty nor her goodness had been sufficient to retain his love, or keep him true to his vow to honour and cherish her. Could he go away without one parting word, one last kiss that might be as the kiss of death? Could he part from his own flesh and blood—his boy, without a pang? Could he leave this sweet child without a final embrace?

He answered, after several moments of silence,

"I should like to see her and the child again, but I am afraid I couldn't stand the interview."

"Take my advice, and don't attempt," said Behrens; "if you do you'll spoil the whole business, and make a fool of yourself."

Isaac had several conversations with Behrens on the subject after this one; and having, so to speak, taken the first plunge, he gradually grew bolder, and came to look upon the scheme with more equanimity. The idea of the fortune and the partnership gradually took a powerful hold upon him, and he began to vaguely think that any villany short of actual murder was justified under the circumstances. At any rate it dawned upon him that such a trifling obstruction as a wife and child was not to be allowed to stand in his progress towards an immense fortune.

Mr. Behrens looked upon the whole affair from a purely business point of view. So far as he was concerned he was engaging in a speculation that he hoped would turn out a profitable one for him. As a business man he had no heart to soften with pity for suffering, and no ears to listen with sympathy to the cries of distress. Business was business with him, and he held that business and sentiment were like oil and water—they would not amalgamate. During the month that elapsed between the receipt of Mr. Greth's letter and Isaac's departure Mr. Behrens elaborated all his plans. He had a legal bond drawn up whereby Isaac Luck made himself

this man's debtor to the enormous amount of one hundred thousand pounds, it being artfully set forth in the bond that the debt was for money lent, for services rendered, and for the purchase of Mr. Behrens' house and grounds situated at Chowringee, Calcutta. The house and grounds were a blind, for at the outside they were not worth more than five thousand pounds. But by inserting them it gave a *bona fide* flavour to the document. It was further stated that the debt was to be a first mortgage on the debtor's estate.

This bond was duly attested, signed and sealed, and snugly deposited in Mr. Samuel Behrens' safe along with many other valuable securities.

During this month Isaac was once seized with a nearly irresistible desire to once more see his wife and child, and it is not at all unlikely that he would have yielded to this desire but for the fact that he hurried off to Behrens on purpose that he might come under the influence of that gentleman, knowing that the influence would restrain him, if anything could. And it did.

The nature of the agreement between him and Behrens was, that Behrens was to take means to insure Isaac against annoyance or exposure on the part of his wife, in case she should come to hear of his fortune, but no violence was to be offered to either the woman or the child.

In order that her suspicions might be allayed, in case she had any, if she heard that her husband had left Calcutta, Behrens undertook to arrange that his wife should call on Mrs. Luck, some time after Isaac had left, and say he had been suddenly summoned round to Bombay on important business affairs in connection with the firm. Not one single word, however, of the true state of matters had been breathed to Mrs. Behrens. Her husband had a very mean opinion of woman's power to keep secrets, and he never trusted his better half with any. As it would not be possible, though, to keep Isaac's departure from her knowledge, she was to be informed that he wished to go to England for a short time, but did not wish Mrs. Luck to know that he had gone, so that she was to be told that he had taken his departure for his old quarters, Bombay.

The carrying out of this little plot was rendered easy enough by the fact of Isaac being separated from his wife. Since they had

parted by mutual consent they had never once met, and he had held no communication with her. He paid the rent of her apartments regularly every month, and at the same time sent her money for her own use. Behrens undertook to keep this arrangement up when Isaac had gone away.

The plan being thus matured, and everything settled, Isaac turned his back upon Calcutta, and the night before he left, Mr. Behrens gave a grand dinner at his house in honour of his departing friend.

Seven weeks from that time—Isaac having travelled to England by the overland route—he met his employer in Liverpool after many years' separation.

"God bless my life, how you have altered, boy," exclaimed Mr. Greth, as he shook Isaac's hand. "Why, you're burnt brown, and you've got a lot of hair about your face."

"Well, sir, you must remember it's a good many years since I went away," answered Isaac.

"Ay, so it is, so it is," sighed the old man. "It's a slice out of one's life, isn't it? But still I didn't expect to see you looking quite so old. I suppose, though, the Indian climate does age one."

If Mr. Greth was surprised at the alteration that had taken place in Isaac, Isaac was none the less surprised at the alteration that had taken place in Mr. Greth. His fears that he might not live to see his protégé again had not been realised, but he looked as if his days were numbered. He had had a stroke, and it had partially disabled his left side, so that his activity of body had gone.

He was feeble and bent, and his face was very wrinkled and drawn up, while his head was quite bald, save for a ragged little knotty fringe of yellowish, iron-grey hair. His small eyes were bleared and more sunken; the skin of his hands was puckered, and the blue veins stood out like small cords.

His appearance, however, was not so much suggestive of great age as of a worn-out frame; and, in truth, he was not very old, being as yet under seventy. But the fires of his being had burned swiftly and fierce, and had exhausted the fuel before its time. His brain, however, still remained perfect. That, strange to say, was as clear and vigorous as ever, and he still was the moving force and the ruling power in the business. As regards his personal habits, they

were still the same. He still, with the same regularity as of old, went down every day for his midday meal at the little time-honoured hostelry near the water, and there he took his humble chop and pint of old ale, and smoked his porcelain pipe in the ingle nook. And twice every week he stole away on the quiet about seven o'clock in the evening, and he made his way up to Scotland Road. Here, in a sort of mission-hall that he hired for the purpose, he collected all the riff-raff that liked to drift in—men, women, but especially children; and here he gave them such a bumping meal of hot soup, and vegetables and meat and bread, that, as many of the waifs used to say, they could quite easily do without anything to eat for a couple of days afterwards. The old man personally saw that all his guests were well attended to, and when they were full he spoke some godly words to them in his peculiar, blunt way. There was no formal, set affair: he had no chairman, no platform, no missionaries. He didn't believe in these things. These wandering waifs were his hobby, and he dealt with them after his own fashion. And how they loved him! How those ragged, sticky, claggy children clung about his legs; and how the bony women appealed to him in their sorrow and care; and how the hulking men, and drivelling ones as well, were awed into silence by his lightest word!

These meetings were, so to speak, carried on in a hole-and-corner sort of way, for Isaac Greth shrank from any of his awful deeds of this kind ever seeing the light of day.

Mr. Greth was not a demonstrative man, and therefore he made no outward show of being affected at once more meeting Luck, but he was affected nevertheless, and it was singular how often his great red pocket-handkerchief was brought out, either to rub his old horn spectacles or to wipe his face, although he didn't seem to perspire at all.

"You see the Lord has spared me," he said, continuing the conversation, "and I'm thankful, for I want to say many things to you that I couldn't have said so well on paper. I don't think now I shall die for some time, because you know a broken gate hangs long on its hinges. I told you I intended to give you half-a-million of money, and a partnership in the business if you behave yourself."

Mr. Greth spoke of the half-million much in the way that a father might tell his boy that he was going to give him a Christmas-box, if he were a good lad.

"But you needn't think you are going to get it yet. I am not altogether pleased with the reports that have been sent home to me from time to time about your conduct. You seem to have been rather riding the high horse, and you want taking down a little. However, you have done your work well. That's something in your favour. Now, I've this to tell you, young fellow, the letter I wrote to you is known to no living soul but you and me, unless you have shown it to anyone yourself, and I charge you now to keep my intentions a locked secret. Do you understand?"

"I quite understand, sir," Isaac answered, trembling internally with suppressed excitement.

"Very well, see that you obey me, then. For the time being you will take your place amongst the office clerks, and I shall show you no more leniency, nor allow you any more latitude, than they have. You and Marguerite Greth will come together, and you must study each other, and learn each other's peculiarities, before you link yourselves as man and wife. I love my niece Marguerite. She is as dear to me as my own eyesight. See to it, sir, that you don't trifle with her, for if you do, and I am living, I'll shoot you, and if I am dead I'll haunt you. You see, I'm a dreadful old man, and I have never been troubled with that thing called a heart. I'm as hard as flint, and can be as wrathful as Jove. So I give you fair caution not to do anything that you would be ashamed of the light of day shining upon. My soul revolts against deceit. Have a care, and see to it that you are honest."

This was the way Mr. Greth talked to Isaac on their first meeting.

And this "dreadful old man," who had "never been troubled with a thing called a heart," and who was "as hard as flint," wended his way home—for the interview had been held in his private room at the office—silently and thoughtfully through the dripping rain of a murky and sloppy night, so thoughtful was he that he forgot to hoist his bulging gingham umbrella, which he carried under his arm, and when at last his reverie was broken by

a wretched, draggled, wan-faced, consumptive thing, in the form of a woman, with a bundle huddled to her cold, bony breast for warmth, screaming out a ballad in hectic gasps, this dreadful old man, who was as hard as flint, actually flourished his bulging gingham at her, and demanded to know why she didn't go home on such a dreadful night, and take that miserable child out of the rain.

And when she answered him with frothy blood on her lips, and told him with a hysterical sob that she hadn't a home in the wide world except the street, he actually drove her—yes, there is no other word for it—into a shop whose windows were dripping with steam that arose from hot viands, and when he had made her eat something, and he had sent out for a pint of new milk for the puling, chalky-faced atom called the baby, he slipped a sovereign into her cold hand, and then gave her an order for the hospital, to which he was a munificent patron and a life subscriber. And having done these things this dreadful old man, who had never been troubled with such a thing as a heart, and who was as hard as flint, went out into the sloppy night again with his bulging umbrella under his arm. It was exactly a week from that night that the draggled woman, whom he had treated so badly, was lying clean and warm and comfortable in a bed in the cheerful hospital ward, when a spurt of blood came from her mouth, and having mumbled something about God blessing the dear old gentleman, the silly creature died. And the puling, chalky-faced atom called the baby, but no longer chalky-faced nor puling, became an inmate of the dreadful old man's orphan asylum.

CHAPTER XXV.

“SHE KNEW NOW SHE HAD GOT HER SKELETON.”

ON the Cheshire side of the River Mersey, close to the pretty little village of Trammere, stood a small detached villa, bearing the somewhat high-sounding name of “Lucknow House.” It was surrounded with about an acre of ground that was very tastefully laid out; a corner of it that was screened by a neatly-clipped hedge being utilised as a vegetable garden, while the rest was given over to flowers and walks, and a lawn that was level as a billiard table, and green as the crest of a sea wave when the sun shines through it. Not only had very considerable taste been displayed in arranging this acre of ground, but great ingenuity had been called into play in order that the greatest possible amount could be got into the smallest possible space. The garden might almost be described as a miniature park. Of course, very miniature indeed, but still the trees and shrubs were so planted that as one wandered about the walks he half-expected to be able to go on for miles, while patches of green sward and a mossy bank or two kept up the illusion.

The house itself, which was modern, had been built on an artificial terrace, from which a broad flight of half-a-dozen steps led on to the lawn. On each side of the steps was a pilaster bearing a marble vase filled with flowers.

The house was two-storied, with a Gothic roof and dormer windows. The entrance was through a gateway from the road, then up a little curved drive to a short flight of steps under a porch supported on carved wooden pillars, up which jessamine and woodbine were trained. On the sunny side of the house, projecting from just above the lower story windows, was a slanting roof composed of small slabs of oak, and supported by light oaken

pillars, thus forming a verandah, on to which a French window opened from the drawing-room. At the end of this verandah was a small greenhouse filled with a choice collection of plants, and having a communication with the breakfast-room. The pillars and roof of this verandah were covered with creeping plants, that had been trained to hang over in graceful festoons.

The northern face of Lucknow House commanded a panoramic view of a noble sweep of the river, the great line of docks on the other side, with their forest and tangle of masts and rigging; and the huge town with its miles of houses, its windmills, its tall chimneys, and its dun pall of smoke. The same taste that characterised the exterior of this villa was also apparent even in a more marked degree in the interior, although personal comfort had evidently been the guiding motive in all that had been done. There was nothing vulgar, nothing lavish. Some engravings, an oil painting or two, some water-colour sketches, a few parian marble statuettes and terra-cotta vases and figures, represented the art collection, though there was a good deal of *bric-à-brac*, mostly in the shape of Indian odds and ends, ivory and sandalwood fans, card cases, boxes, ebony elephants, carved balls, cups, worked slippers, and other trifles of this nature, which were disposed about in cabinets and on the mantelpieces. The furniture of the drawing-room was black and gold, brought into strong relief by a luxurious and splendid Peshawur carpet of neutral tints, the prevailing colour being a silver-grey. The dining-room had a dark oaken suite of furniture, the entrance into the conservatory being arranged with a pair of heavy, massive scarlet and gold curtains from the looms of Delhi.

On one side of the room hung a half-length portrait of a strikingly handsome young man in military dress, and opposite him was a beautiful young woman. The visitors, glancing at these two portraits, saw at once that they did not represent brother and sister, and there was something about them that at once suggested husband and wife; and this was the case. The portraits were those of Lieutenant Vavasour and his wife Blanche, whom the reader has already met, not as a wife though, but a widow on board the *Pearl*. We meet her now, though no longer as a widow, for she is the wife of Dr. Lancelot Amelius Shadwell.

It will be remembered that when the *Pearl* reached Gravesend, and just before Mrs. Vavasour, as she was then, was going ashore, Dr. Shadwell exacted from her a promise that she would become his wife within two months. The lady gave this promise at the time rather from a sense of being under a deep obligation to the doctor. His skill and attention had saved her life, and she felt grateful, but she never could somehow quite shake off a vague, nervous dread she had that the doctor would not make her happy. She had a great many relations and friends, but she had been estranged from her relations through her marriage with Lieutenant Vavasour, which had been against the wish of the entire family. Her mother was dead, but her father, the Rev. George Wimpole, was still living, and was the incumbent of a populous and beautiful parish in Devonshire. She went to stay with her father, and very naturally he expected that she would take up her permanent residence with him. He approved of her determination to adopt the child that had been rescued at sea under such strange circumstances, and in a few days he had grown quite fond of the little fellow.

At first Mrs. Vavasour hesitated to tell her father of her approaching marriage with Dr. Shadwell, for she was sure that he would not approve of it, if, on no other grounds, certainly on those of being too soon after her first husband's death. She summoned up courage at last, however, to tell him all the story. At first the old man expressed himself very much against this union. He said that connections formed under such circumstances and so hastily never turned out well.

It is not at all improbable that she might have been influenced by her father to break this engagement off, had it not been for her solemnly given promise; but she felt that that was binding, and so Mr. Wimpole invited Dr. Shadwell down to be his guest in order that he might learn something about him.

Mr. Wimpole and the doctor got on very well together, and the old man took to him kindly, and he made it publicly known that he was to be his future son-in-law.

The news of this approaching second marriage gave rise to some very silly scandal in the parish, and a good deal of frivolous chatter. People who seemed to consider it was their special mission to pay

attention to other folks' affairs instead of minding their own, gave it as their decided opinion that the widow ought to be ashamed of herself to marry so soon after the death of her husband.

"But there, she has always been flighty," testily exclaimed these righteous-minded folk.

One person in the parish heard the news with very poignant feelings of grief. This person was of the male sex, and bore the unromantic name of John Robinson. He was exactly the same age, with the exception of a few days, of Mrs. Blanche Vavasour. These two had known each other as children, their parents having been neighbours. Robinson's father had been an officer in her Majesty's navy. His family consisted of John and two girls. When a comparatively young man Mr. Robinson was one of a boat's crew sent on shore to one of the South Sea Islands to procure water and cut wood. He then held a commission on board of a gunboat that for three years had been on surveying duty in the South Seas. The boat's crew were attacked by natives, some of the crew were killed, others wounded. Amongst the wounded was Mr. Robinson. He was struck in the arm with a poisoned arrow. For a long time his life was despaired of. He was invalided home and put on the retired list; and though he lived for some years his health was shattered, and he died at the early age of fifty-four. Previous to his death he settled in Devonshire, where he bought a small farm and amused himself with agricultural pursuits, thinking that that sort of thing would be conducive to the prolongment of his life. His family and the Wimpoles were neighbours, and in the course of time an attachment sprung up between John and Blanche. It never came to anything, however. They quarrelled, and subsequently Miss Wimpole became the wife of Lieutenant Vavasour.

John Robinson was a fine lad; burly and strong—as robust in mind as he was in body. He was redolent of the country. His bright eyes and ruddy cheeks spoke of rude health. He was passionately fond of country life, of field sports, and manly exercise. He was full of animal spirits. He detested humbug, was frank, open, and honourable, and enjoyed life thoroughly. His sister married young, and when his father died the little property passed into his hands, and he and his mother lived together.

Their farm was known as "The Retreat," and it was almost an ideal place. It was one of those quaint, old-fashioned, picturesque little dwellings only to be found in England. The estate consisted of about two hundred acres, and was very productive and valuable. In addition to this snug little property, he would at his mother's death become possessed of about fourteen thousand pounds in consols, so that he was fairly well circumstanced. He had always hoped, and in fact looked upon it as a certainty at one time, to make Blanche Wimpole the mistress of The Retreat; but she jilted him, to use a common phrase, and nobody but John himself knew how keen was the disappointment. People said he was too fond of hounds and hunting, of fishing and billiards, to be much affected. He had no sentiment, they said. Well, John kept his own thoughts, and though his ruddy cheeks didn't get white, and his yeoman's laughter less loud, he had loved and sorrowed nevertheless. Then came the news that Mrs. Vavasour was a widow, and with it a revivification of John Robinson's hopes. He would get his early love after all. Now, then, his hopes died again, for between him and the widow stood Dr. Shadwell.

"You see, John," said his mother, one evening—a quiet, stately lady in spectacles and widow's weeds—"you see, John, Mrs. Vavasour is a very flighty creature after all, as I have always told you."

"Yes, my dear old mammy, so you have," answered John, as he kissed her affectionately, "but don't talk about it, please. I don't like to hear anything said against Blanche. She has a right to do as she likes."

So after that little conversation the lady's name was never again mentioned. But that night, in the silence of his room, John opened a desk and took out a miniature of a fair young girl, and round the miniature was a tress of sunny hair.

"Ah, Blanche, Blanche," he sighed, "little did I think when you gave me this you would ——. Ah, well, never mind," and he put the miniature back and went to bed.

Mrs. Vavasour had never asked about John Robinson since her return; but she heard indirectly that he was as robust as ever, and that he had broken the hearts of ever so many girls.

It chanced one evening, just before Dr. Shadwell came down,

that Mrs. Vavasour had been paying a visit to a lady in the neighbourhood, and was returning home alone ; but instead of coming by the high road, as she might have done, she elected to make a detour in order that she might pass through an exquisite lane that was a favourite walk of hers when a girl. It was about five o'clock in the evening, and there was some gold in the air from the setting sun, and the birds were making a great chattering as they answered each other and quarrelled in the rich foliage. There was the scent of wild flowers too, especially woodbine, for it flourished well there, and the lowing of kine came up from the meadows.

Blanche was a little sentimental and a little dreamy, for it was all so like what it was when she was a girl, not so many years ago ; and yet it seemed so far off, for she had been to India, she had been a wife, a mother, and was now a widow, and on the verge of widowhood again.

She stood to lean on a gate that opened into a meadow, through which ran a trout stream. Many a time had she sported in that meadow, and dabbled in that stream, and once had pitched headlong in and been dragged out by John Robinson. They were awfully jolly times those, and she wanted to live them over again in memory.

She had stood about ten minutes when a man came up through the meadow whistling blithely, and with a great Newfoundland dog at his heels. He was a young man, with heavy fishing-boots on, and he wore a pilot jacket and a broad-brimmed straw hat. He carried a fishing-rod and had a creel on his back. Mrs. Vavasour would have hurried away, for that man was John Robinson, but it was too late—he had seen her.

How he did shake her hand to be sure ; and how his honest, saucy eyes peered into her downcast ones.

"God bless my life, who would have thought it?" he cried, in his ringing voice. "Why, it was only yesterday we were youngsters together ; and do you remember how I fished you out of the stream ? What a day that was ! And now you are home from India and a widow ; and, as I hear, going to be—heigho ! What a funny world this is ?"

"Yes, it is a funny world, Mr. Robinson."

"Mr. Robinson," he repeated, reproachfully. "Can I ever be Mr. Robinson to you ?"

"John, then."

"Ah, that's like old times."

She tried to laugh and to look very blithe, and she made a desperate effort at gaiety, as she said,

"I hear, John, that you are a dreadful heart breaker now."

"Oh, I was not aware of it," he returned, quietly. "Still, if you have heard it, perhaps it's true," he added, ironically.

"It's almost a wonder you haven't a wife, John," she said, feeling very confused, and perhaps a little guilty.

"Do you think so?" he asked, looking at her.

"Yes. A handsome young man like you, with a good income, ought to make some poor girl's life bright."

John checked a sigh as he answered,

"I have only known one girl in all my life that I have ever had any desire to make my wife, and as I didn't get her I'll never have another."

Mrs. Vavasour felt the sting severely, and she saw the little cloud in his face, and noticed the touch of sorrow in his voice.

"You must be pretty fond of married life," he added, "for I understand you are about to be married again."

"Yes," she faltered, not daring to look at him, "but there are circumstances in connection with my engagement that are peculiar. I was dangerously ill, and he nursed me and saved my life."

"And so as his fee he claims your hand?"

"Yes."

"And does the heart go with it, Blanche?"

"Don't ask me that question, John."

He looked at her very hard, as if trying to read her thoughts, but she wouldn't look at him. She was intent on flicking the hedge with her parasol, as they strolled along.

"What sort of a man is this future husband of yours?"

"Why don't you pay my father a visit, and then I will introduce you to Dr. Shadwell. My father says that you have never been to the house since I went away."

"No," answered John, after some irresolution, "and you needn't ask why. But I will call. I am anxious to see what number two is like."

As Mrs. Vavasour parted from this young man she was afraid to

let her heart tell her the truth, but she knew that John Robinson's image had come back into it again.

Mr. Robinson called the next day, much to Mr. Wimpole's amazement but also to his delight, for he had always been very fond of John, and greatly wanted him for his son-in-law. But Blanche was wilful.

Dr. Shadwell and John Robinson got on pretty well together. The doctor liked fishing and riding, and so he was invited to The Retreat, and given a mount. Shadwell did not know that John was an old sweetheart of Blanche's, and it was not considered necessary to tell him.

In the course of a few weeks the men had become quite intimate and liked each other. Shadwell was an agreeable companion. He was witty, and in a certain way clever. He enjoyed himself very much, for his new-made friend gave him plenty of fishing and riding.

The wedding was a quiet affair. Mr. Wimpole officiated in his own church. Mrs. Vavasour strongly objected to any fuss being made, and her father was of her mind. So it was all quite homely and unconventional. John Robinson was invited, but he didn't come. He excused himself on the plea of a prior engagement. The bride was glad of this; she felt that she could not have been comfortable had he been present.

Amongst the gifts sent to the bride was a small gold box, chased with scroll work. It contained a tiny bunch of fresh forget-me-nots, tied with a piece of white satin ribbon. There was nothing to indicate the sender of the box, but Mrs. Shadwell didn't want any indication. She knew it was John Robinson. How did she know? Why, her heart told her!

Dr. Shadwell and his wife spent their honeymoon in Cornwall. Then they went to London, and she made the acquaintance of his family. They were a very good family indeed, but poor. Shadwell's father, indeed, had had a struggle to bring his family up respectably.

After three months' wandering about—during which the child of the wreck, Petrel, as he was still called, was left under the care of Mr. Wimpole—they settled down at Tranmere. Dr. Shadwell was anxious to get a practice in Liverpool if possible, but this house at Tranmere happened to have been built by a friend of Mr. Wimpole's,

who, growing tired of it, or finding it too expensive, or something, wanted to sell it. Mr. Wimpole bought the freehold and gave it to his daughter as a marriage present.

Dr. Shadwell did not seem altogether pleased with this arrangement. He said that the house was out of the way, and that he could never hope for a practice in a place like Tranmere. He would be out of the world. He would be buried, and much more to this effect. The true cause of his dissatisfaction, however, was the house being settled on his wife instead of on himself.

Mrs. Shadwell took a great interest in furnishing this place, and she tried to enlist her husband's interest, but quite failed. When all was finished, however, he gave her credit for having displayed great taste, and made an exceedingly comfortable home; and he at once invited John Robinson to come and spend a week or two with them. John came, and when he went away, his opinion of Shadwell had somewhat altered. He came to the conclusion that he was a passionate man, and could if he liked be very bitter. He also discovered that weakness of Shadwell's for gambling. He discovered it conversationally, not practically.

Mrs. Shadwell was not long in learning that she had married a man who wanted to keep her very much in subjection. Now that they were settled, she announced her intention of going into Devonshire, in order that she might bring Petrel back. To this her husband opposed himself, and said that that child should never come into his house, for he hated children, and certainly was not going to be bothered with another man's child.

This almost broke Mrs. Shadwell's heart, and she was so grief-stricken that he relented, and so the child was brought. It was evident, however, that her married life was not to be a happy one. Her husband had manifested a strong desire to have control over her money, but wisely she would not consent to this, and at last he told her that if she did not pay his debts, which amounted to nearly two thousand pounds, their furniture would be seized.

This revelation was a terrible blow to her, but she felt as if she were being deservedly punished, and though it crippled her income a good deal, she paid the debts and held her peace. She knew now she had got her skeleton, but, like the good, sensible little woman she was, she locked it away out of everybody's sight.

When they had been nearly a year at Tranmere, her husband announced his intention of going to sea again. Mrs. Shadwell was very glad, but she didn't say so. So the doctor obtained a berth on board of a vessel that was going to Calcutta. He had previously been offered one bound for Australia, but would not accept it. He said he particularly wanted to go back to Calcutta, and he waited until the opportunity occurred. He went out in a ship called the *Simoom*. Mrs. Shadwell saw him off, and then she shut up her house for a time, and went into Devonshire to see her father and to give Petrel a change of air.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE GOLDEN PAST.

THE Rev. Mr. Wimpole was staggered by the news that his son-in-law had gone to sea. Mrs. Shadwell conveyed it to him in person. She had deemed it prudent not to write and tell him that Lancelot was going, for it would only worry him. As it was it greatly upset him.

"Have you had a quarrel, then?" he asked.

"No, papa; not exactly. But things have not been quite as pleasant as they might have been."

Mr. Wimpole was much concerned, but seeing the disinclination on his daughter's part to give him any particulars, he refrained from questioning her, and out of the goodness of his heart gave her credit for wishing to screen her husband's faults.

Hearing that she was back again, and naturally thinking her husband was with her, John Robinson called, and he also was greatly surprised to learn that her husband had gone away. John invited her to go over to The Retreat, and take luncheon with his mother some morning, saying, that he would drive her back early in the afternoon, and so with the consent of her father she accepted the invitation about a week afterwards.

Mrs. Robinson was delighted to see her, and they talked a great deal about old times. After luncheon John took her into the stables, and over the garden, and picked fresh fruit for her, and then they wandered into the charming old apple orchard, with its moss-grown trees and its soft, springy under-turf.

"Do you remember how we used to swing here, Blan—— I beg your pardon, Mrs. Shadwell? You see the old swing posts are still standing. They're rotten now; but look here, I was thinking of you the other day when I was picking some apples here, and I

scraped away the green film from this post, and do you see what I brought to light?"

"What is it, John? Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. —."

"No, no, call me John; I'm only a bachelor, you know, and am always John to you. Well, don't you see what it is? It's our initials in a true lovers' knot."

"La! I had forgotten all about that."

"I hadn't, though. I remember perfectly well when I carved it. It was a June Saturday afternoon. Ah! I carved your name on my heart at the same time."

"O John, don't let us talk of that."

"No. It's better not. But I did think one time you would be mistress of this pretty place. It will have no mistress now until after I'm dead."

"John, why do you not get married?" she asked.

"Get married!" he laughed. "No, not I."

"I am sure you would be happier."

"Not at all. I'm happy enough in a certain way. Never mind, if my heart's a bit broken, that's nothing. While my dear old mother lives I shall stay here. If she dies before me I shall sell up and go and wander about the world for some years. I've a great desire to travel."

"And of course you'll be falling in love with some wealthy foreign beauty and marrying her," said Mrs. Shadwell, with a forced laugh and trying to appear jocular.

He looked at her with his earnest eyes, and after a pause said very seriously,

"I made a vow, made it solemnly, that if I couldn't have you I would never have a wife. I will keep that vow."

And she knew, too, that he would.

"Come, John, let us go in," she said, with a futile attempt to conceal her emotion. "Your mother will wonder what has become of us."

They sat on the little lawn in front of the house and drank tea, and were waited on by a neat handed Phyllis, white-capped and white-aproned.

It was very pleasant there looking across the shining meadow to where the river glinted like a silver thread. The birds were very

tuneful, and the smell of new-mown hay made the air heavy with its fragrance. There were flowers everywhere, and a gentle breeze crept up from the river and stirred the jessamine, and blew its white blossoms over Mrs. Shadwell.

John seemed very bright and cheerful, and laughed so heartily that it would have been difficult to believe that his heart was a "bit broken," as he had said. But then John Robinson was as honest as daylight, and so what he had said was no doubt true.

The sun was declining as he drove Mrs. Shadwell back in his dogcart. Before he left her she said,

"I have to thank you for one of the happiest days I've had for a very long time. It has reminded me of old times. If you are in Liverpool, John, I hope you won't fail to come over to Tranmere and see me. You are my husband's friend, and therefore quite privileged to call. Besides, I am going to write to an orphan cousin of mine to come and stay with me during Lancelot's absence. She's a very pretty girl indeed, and I shall try and make a match between you."

A derisive smile came into John's face at this, but he made no remark on it.

"Well, good-bye," he said. "I should not be surprised if I drop down on you some day."

In a few days Mrs. Shadwell was back in her pretty home at Tranmere, and she had taken Petrel back with her. The child had developed very much, and had become a very pretty and interesting boy. The orphan cousin to whom Mrs. Shadwell had referred, a Miss Grace Darlington, came in due course to stay with her. A nurse was also procured for the child, two other servants for the house, and a gardener, who also looked after the pony for the basket phaeton, so that at the head of this little household Mrs. Shadwell did not feel lonely. It must not be supposed that during all the many months that had passed since her return to England she had ceased to think of the strange incident of the abstraction of the papers from the bag taken from the woman who had been rescued from the wreck. The loss of those papers had always been as a shadow over her, and had cost her long and anxious thought. Since that day when she had mentioned the subject to Dr. Shadwell on board the *Pearl*, as she lay at

Gravesend, she had never again reverted to it. And her suspicion that he really was the guilty person grew strong and faded away—grew strong and faded away again. She never could bring herself to quite believe that he did it, after his emphatic denial, and yet she could not wholly dismiss the idea that he must be the one. For who else was there who could or would have committed such a theft? And yet what puzzled her very much indeed was to define something like an adequate motive for her husband's commission of such a deed, assuming that it was he who stole the contents of the bag. It was obvious from what the dying woman herself had said that the bag contained some particulars of herself and child. What possible interest could Dr. Shadwell have had in abstracting those particulars? It would seem on the face of it a most senseless and stupid proceeding. The woman's words suggested that she had been wronged. If this was so, it was not unreasonable to infer that she was somebody of consequence, and that a sinister outrage had been committed upon her.

Whether this was so or not, Mrs. Shadwell felt it was none the less her bounden duty to make every effort to discover something about the dead woman, for the living child's sake. In fact, that duty had been imposed upon her by the dying creature herself, and that in a very solemn manner.

One can readily comprehend, however, how this duty presented itself to Mrs. Shadwell as one all but impossible of accomplishment. If she had had some definite clue to guide her she might have followed that clue to a successful issue. As it was now she was quite in the dark.

It was after long and earnest pondering over the subject that she came to the conclusion that she must take somebody into her confidence. The half of the Bank of England note for £100 was still in her possession. When she had discovered that she had said to herself, "This is a weapon, and a woman ought to know how to use it." So it seemed then, in fact it seemed so now, but she had to confess that, powerful weapon though it might be, she did not know how to avail herself of the power it gave her. More than once she had been tempted to tell her husband, and ask his advice. But whenever that thought came over her there came also with it the shadow of that suspicion she had had, and this de-

tered her. Now her husband was away. And moreover, he had acted towards her in a manner well calculated to estrange her from him.

In her dilemma she began to ask herself who there was amongst her acquaintances to whom she could appeal for assistance. At first she thought of her father. On the first blush he did seem, and possibly was, the most suitable person; but she remembered that if she told him all the story she would have also to tell of her suspicions about her husband.

When she related to her father, in the first instance, the particulars of the rescue of the woman and child, she had carefully avoided referring to the bag and its lost contents, for no other reason than that of not wishing to prejudice her husband in her father's sight. This same reason still influenced her, and she put her father out of the question. Who else was there, then? The same reason that militated against her father militated against all her other relatives. But there was one person to whom she felt drawn to, irresistibly as it were; one whose sterling honesty and nobleness of mind singled him out as the one man of all others that she could most rely upon for sound advice and faithful assistance—that person was John Robinson.

If she had been asked why she did not object running the risk of prejudicing John Robinson against her husband, she would have found it a very difficult matter indeed to give a satisfactory answer. Perhaps mentally and involuntarily she had critically compared the two men, much to the disadvantage of Dr. Shadwell. Be that as it may, she decided, after much grave reflection, to seek the advice of John Robinson. So in the course of some days she wrote a letter to Mrs. Robinson about nothing in particular, and she wound up by saying, "By the way, if John should happen to be coming to Liverpool, I hope he will not fail to look me up, as I am going to ask him to do a little service for me."

Mrs. Shadwell knew perfectly well when she wrote that John had no business to call him to Liverpool, and his last visit was the first he had ever paid to the town. But she also knew that John would not be long before he did come if he thought she wanted him. She had a lively recollection of the time when he would have gone to the farthest ends of the earth to serve her, and

would have given his little finger almost for her smile. She had not thought much of him then, and found no difficulty at all in sacrificing him for the handsome, dashing Lieutenant Vavasour. But she knew that he had forgiven her, and would be only too glad to help her in her emergency.

Nor was she wrong, for about a week after she had posted her letter, she received an answer from Mrs. Robinson to say, that although John had nothing to call him to Liverpool, he would be delighted to go if he could be of any service to her. The result was, Mr. John Robinson once more found himself a guest at Lucknow House.

It was on the second evening after his arrival that Mrs. Shadwell took him into her confidence and told him her little trouble, taking care, however, to conceal her suspicions about her husband.

Mr. Robinson listened to the story with considerable astonishment and deep interest, but very naturally he asked if she had not suspected anyone of the robbery of the contents of the bag.

It was a struggle for her to refrain from telling him the truth, but she did refrain, and said,

"Well, I had my suspicions about a certain person on board the ship, but I have never been able to bring myself to think that those suspicions were justified, and so I won't mention the person's name."

"I may at least inquire if the person was male or female?"

"A male."

"Have you ever tried to think what his motive was?"

"I never could think of anything like a reasonable motive."

"I should say that it was money," John answered. "The thief probably deemed it likely that the bag contained money. That it did contain money is proved by the half-note now in your possession, and I have no doubt there was more there, and the rascal overlooked this half by accident."

"But why did he not restore the papers in order that the boy's identity might be established?"

"I suppose he got frightened, and did not like to risk putting the papers back, or he may have found them valuable to him in some way. A good deal depends on the class of thief he was. If an ignorant, stupid person he might destroy the documents out of sheer wantonness; but if a person of intelligence he might perceive

the value of the papers, and so preserve them for future sinister design."

Mrs. Shadwell began to see the whole affair in a new light, and that suspicion of hers that had flickered and sank, as it were, grew strong again, and at the same time her admiration for Mr. Robinson's acumen was very great.

John examined the bank-note, or rather the half. It was a note that had evidently not been long in circulation, as it had not lost its brightness and crispness.

"I am rather struck by that name," he said. "Caleb Skeats is not an ordinary name by any means. There is an American twang about it, and we ought to try and find out who Caleb Skeats is or was."

"But how are we to do that, John?"

"By advertising. It is pretty certain that the other half of this note is in existence, and as one-half is not of the slightest use without the other, and if the holder of the other half should see the advertisement he might be induced to come forward, for a hundred pounds will tempt some men to run a great risk."

"It might," Mrs. Shadwell thought. But she did not deem it in the least degree probable that it would induce her husband to come forward, assuming, of course, that he was the holder of the other half.

She knew now what she had not suspected at first, that when Dr. Shadwell married her he was in pecuniary straits, and she could not dismiss from her mind the belief that her small fortune had been the attraction for him, and not she herself. Of course, if he had treated her with kindness and affection she would never have entertained this notion for one single instant, but all the evidence was in favour of her belief; for before their honeymoon had thoroughly waned he exhibited a feverish anxiety to have control of her money, and when he found that the house and ground her father had bought for her at Tranmere was to be settled entirely on herself, he could no longer control his disappointment and anger, and it was soon after that he decided to go to sea again. And then the revelation he had made that he was in debt to the extent of £2000, which she would have to pay, showed that he had little regard for her happiness or welfare. The fact that she had

paid that £2000 she carefully concealed from her father, for she dare not tell him. Doting and fond and indulgent as he was, she was sure he would be very severe about that, and moreover she was anxious to conceal her husband's faults.

Although she had thus proved to her bitter cost that her husband was lacking in those principles of honour and uprightness which at one time she thought he possessed, she did not imagine that he would be tempted to expose himself for the sake of a hundred pounds. Therefore, if she had not been wronging him all this time by suspecting that he was the purloiner of the contents of the bag, it was not at all likely that the other half of the note would be discovered.

It will be understood that her main object was not the recovery of the other half of the note for the sake of the hundred pounds, but she hoped to find out who the person was who had endorsed the note, that is, the bearer of the name of Caleb Skeats ; because if this person could be discovered there was the likelihood that he would be able to give some information that would enlighten her as to how the half of the note came to be in the bag found on the person of the woman brought from the wreck. It was customary for some people to endorse bank-notes, and Caleb Skeats must have had an existence, so that if he could only be discovered he might possibly recollect the time when he had a hundred pound Bank of England note in his possession, and who received it from him. If he had paid it direct to the unfortunate woman on whose person the half was found, the name of that woman might be learned, and her name would be the key to her history.

All these points were discussed *pro* and *con* by Mrs. Shadwell and John Robinson ; and though she was careful in the conversation, when referring to or speaking of her husband, not to say anything that might be the means of bringing Dr. Shadwell's faults prominently forward, John, nevertheless, could not help gathering that there was something wrong. What that something was he could not tell, but he was sure there had been some misunderstanding, if not serious disagreement, between Mrs. Shadwell and her husband, though he refrained from saying anything to indicate his thoughts then, but he determined at a future time to avail himself of his privileges as an intimate friend to ask her some questions.

"Well, now, my opinion is," he said, when they had exhausted the subject, "that the best thing we can do is to put the matter into the hands of our old lawyer, Fenwick. He's a slow-going old country buffer, but we can depend upon him."

The result was, Mr. Fenwick, the "slow-going old country buffer," was made acquainted with so much of the story as was deemed necessary for him to know, and in due course the following advertisement appeared in all the London daily papers and some of the leading provincial ones:—

"CALEB SKEATS.—Anyone answering to this name will receive fifty pounds reward if he can give certain information that is required. Address in the first instance to George Fenwick, Esq., solicitor, Torbridge, Devonshire."

The "fifty pounds" reward was determined on by Mrs. Shadwell as being likely to induce people bearing the name to write. For three whole months did these advertisements appear, however, without bringing forth any response, proving thereby that the Caleb Skeats were not quite as numerous as the Smiths or Joneses. At length, when Mrs. Shadwell had determined to spend no more money in advertising, she received the following note as an enclosure from Mr. Fenwick:—

"79 FRANKLIN STREET, BOSTON, MASS., U.S.A.

"SIR,—My attention has been drawn to an advertisement in an English paper in which you invite persons bearing the name of Caleb Skeats to write to you. The name, or rather the two names together, are so uncommon that I thought I would write to inquire the nature of the information you want. I may mention, however, that I am not Caleb Skeats, but Mary Skeats. My husband though was called Caleb, and he was drowned at sea. At any rate it is supposed so, for he went to sea, and the ship he sailed in was never heard of any more. I first met him in Calcutta where we were married. Before I married him I was a spinster, and my name was Mary Dothelle.—Hoping that I may be of service, I am, sir, yours truly,
MARY SKEATS."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THERE WERE GOLDEN GLEAMS LYING ATHWART THE SEA.

WHEN Isaac Greth said that his niece Marguerite Greth was not good-looking he was strictly accurate, as he was in all things that he said and did.

In the first place, she was very lame, and owing to this she had contracted a peculiar leaning to one side, which suggested that she was humpbacked, though that was not the case. Her face was drawn and rather puckered, as if from chronic pain, though possibly it was due more to mental distress than physical suffering. Her complexion was sallow, and her hair a very pronounced red.

For these natural defects she was compensated by a large amount of talent of no ordinary kind. She was an artist of no mean order, and painted flowers from nature with exquisite taste. She was of a most patient and generous disposition, though showing a tendency to melancholy, which was clearly expressed in her wistful, sorrowful-looking face.

Being an only child, and a cripple in the bargain, she had been very much indulged, and surrounded with everything that wealth could purchase for her. She had had a very different home to what her father had had in his youthful days, when he and his wonderful brother Isaac lived with their parents in a squalid street in Frankfort. She had known no ups and downs, no pangs of pinching poverty, no acquaintance with the terrors of hunger. A refined home and gentle influences had moulded her into a long-suffering and patient girl, but nobody could know her long without discovering that her affliction preyed upon her mind, and she was no doubt conscious of the lack of those personal charms which are a woman's glory and pride.

Of course she will be blamed for this repining, if repining it was ; and it will be said that with the wealth around her she ought to have been absolutely content. Perhaps she ought, but she was

human, and would have sacrificed all the magnificence and riches that were hers, and likely to be hers, if she could only have had beauty of person and robust health.

Her father, unlike his brother Isaac, was ostentatious. He loved show, and state, and magnificence, but he also loved comfort; and so, while his home was superb, it was neither vulgar nor comfortless. He had been ambitious of collecting works of art, and if his ambition had not been quite satisfied—and whose ambition is?—he had at least been fortunate in gathering around him a small gallery of pictures, bronzes, and marbles that was admittedly one of the best private collections in Lancashire. He had also gradually acquired, in connection with his house at Everton, a very considerable estate, which he had laid out as a landscape garden that was unique.

Such was the home of Jacob Greth, the junior partner in the great firm of Greth Brothers, shipowners. It is true that Jacob had had some hand in building up that wealthy firm, but it is also true that the wealth would still have come to the firm, even if Jacob had had nothing to do with it; for although he was clever in his own particular way, he entirely lacked that marvellous power of organizing and forecasting which were the special attributes of his brother. Jacob could do things well when the material was all cut and dried for him, but he was lost when it came to arranging and making the material. Isaac could have done without Jacob, but Jacob could never have done without Isaac; and had he been deprived of his brother at any period during these long years that they had worked together, it is highly probable the business would have crumbled within a year to the nothingness from whence it sprung.

For several years Jacob had been unable to take much active part in the conduct of affairs owing to ill-health, which had compelled him to seek a better climate to that enjoyed by Shipopolis, to coin a word. The consequence was, he had spent four or five months of each year abroad, either in Germany, his native country, or Switzerland. The result was Isaac had worked away ceaselessly, never taking a holiday, never resting, but keeping the various parts of the business together with such wonderful precision, that the great whole was like a delicately-constructed piece of machinery. There was no rasping, no friction, no part out of gear. There was

nothing in connection with the operations of the firm that his busy brain did not understand and grasp. The ramifications went forth from Liverpool to almost every part of the globe, and Isaac in his own person was able to trace those ramifications as if they had been lines on a map, and to tell precisely how they acted on the great centre, and how the centre acted on them.

He had himself expressed this very clearly when his doctor had told him that he must cease work and take a rest.

"Doctor," he had said, in his blunt way, "that building in Water Street, with the sign of Greth Brothers over the door, has arteries and veins extending like a network all over the earth. I am Greth Brothers. I am the heart that pumps the vital fluid through all those veins and arteries. Take the heart away, and the branches will become sapless and wither."

"But you must have rest or you will die, and the branches will wither all the same," urged the doctor.

"No; you are wrong," answered Isaac. "I shall not die before I have completed my task; and before my time comes I shall have moulded and made another heart to take my place."

It was strange that Isaac should have been satisfied to lead such a lonely existence. Many men marvelled and talked of it, and often was the question asked why he had not married? But from Isaac himself never came a word or sign of answer. He knew of course, but the secret was as safe in his bosom as the secrets of those kings and queens who now, as swathed mummies, rest so silently in the Egyptian Pyramids. But his existence after all was only lonely in degree, for there had grown into his life Marguerite, his brother's daughter. She was the one flower in his otherwise flowerless life. She gave his life colour, and tune, and poetry. She was the golden beam that shot athwart his sunless path. That poor crippled girl was not without a special mission in the world when she could bring so much joy to this strange old man. The only pleasure and relaxation he allowed himself was to go on Saturday afternoons to New Brighton with his niece and stay there till Monday morning with her. His great delight was to wander, leaning on her arm, about the beach, watching the ships come and go, and when he saw any bearing the well-known crescent at their masthead, his eyes would brighten up, and he would exclaim, joyfully,

"Ah, Marguerite, there go some of my children."

He used to talk often to her too about her future, and say,

"I am making a husband for you, Marguerite ; one that shall be perfect. From far away over the sea there he shall come some day, when he shall have been moulded into what I wish him to be."

Poor Isaac, it is a pity his far-reaching gaze could not have travelled out to where the sun burned in a tropical heaven, and have seen his protégé as the sun saw him. But there was one trait that was very strong, possibly stronger than all others in Isaac's nature, and that was, he never thought ill of his fellow-men. If ever an honest man walked on God's fair earth that man was Isaac Greth ; and, being so, he believed all men else were honest.

Those were very happy days, indeed, for Isaac, when he wandered on the New Brighton sands. He loved to hear the wash of the water on the beach, because he said it talked to him of ships ; it told him of the great throbbing bosom of old Ocean, with the rich argosies floating there heading for every point of the compass.

At length one day the old man said to Marguerite,

"The husband I have promised you is coming, my child ;" and later still he said, "The husband has come."

But it was not for months after that that Isaac brought Luck and Marguerite together. Possibly he wanted to watch this husband he had specially grown before he trusted the precious happiness of his beloved niece to the young man's keeping. And that he was somewhat disappointed in Isaac was evidenced by his remark one day to him,

"You are not the man I expected to find."

Living in the shadow, so to speak, of that half-million of money, and believing that he was destined some day to wield the destinies of that great firm, Isaac Luck did not take kindly to waiting. He did not like to sit on a high stool all the day, and be subject to all the rigid discipline of the office. Discipline was what he could not bear : it was irksome to him ; he chafed and grew restless. The patience, the steady, dogged, determined perseverance that had so marked the career of the builder of the firm were entirely wanting in Isaac Luck ; nor was the moral rectitude there, nor the honesty, nor the sterling ring of the genuine gold. And over him ever, like a brooding spirit of evil, sat the knowledge of his deserted wife and

child. The secret cankered him. It brought a gloom into his face, and there was ever a restless wandering of his eyes; that wandering peculiar to guilty people who dread that every moment some accusing form will start up from somewhere or another. He grew a little easier in his mind when one day he received a letter, marked *private* and bearing the Indian postmark. The writer of that letter was Mr. Samuel Behrens, and when Isaac Luck had read it over many times until he could repeat it from memory, he tore the paper into minute fragments and burned them, taking especial care that not even the smallest fragment should escape the devouring flame; and when they had all been reduced to ashes, he sighed a sigh of relief as though he had got rid of a nightmare.

It was a summer's day when Isaac at last took Luck out to "Crescent House"—that was Jacob's place at Everton—and brought the young man and woman together. Jacob himself was away at the time. He had gone to Carlsbad. But he and his wife had long been prepared by Isaac for the coming of the man who was to have Marguerite's heart and half-a-million of money, and on whose shoulders was to rest the great responsibility of the firm when the founder had passed away.

At this time Jacob took no part at all in the conduct of the business, for his health had become worse, and he was a confirmed invalid, and Isaac had serious thoughts of buying his brother out.

Marguerite had been apprised by a little note from her uncle that he and his protégé were coming, and she had dressed herself in a pretty dress, and had put a rose in her hair.

"Marguerite," the old man said, "this is Isaac Luck—the man. He is very different to Isaac Luck, the boy, you knew years ago. Ring his heart and see if it sounds genuine; and you, sir," turning to Isaac, "this is Marguerite, whom I have promised you for your wife. But have a care; she is the apple of my eye. Guard her happiness jealously, for she is worth much to you."

This was the way he introduced them. It was original, as were all his ways.

It was the first time Luck had seen his intended wife since his return from India, and his thoughts flew at once from this poor, deformed creature to Lena, the sweetly pretty playmate of his boyhood, and his lawful wife of latter years. Her striking beauty

made Marguerite's plainness the more conspicuous. He shuddered as he thought of her, as though her ghost had come before him. Perhaps it had.

"Isaac," Marguerite began, "I suppose I must call you Isaac, my dear uncle has talked to me for years of you, and I know that our union has been the dream of his life. I hope we shall come to like each other, and be all that my uncle would desire us to be."

"I hope so," answered Isaac, feeling as if her honest eyes were searing him. "Your uncle is eccentric, and has brought us together under somewhat peculiar circumstances; but we must fall in with his eccentricity and accommodate ourselves to his fancy."

"My uncle is original," said Marguerite, as if correcting him, "and has an original way of carrying out his views. But he stands out conspicuous even amongst the purest and best of men. I hope and pray that he may not be deceived in us."

"Why should he be?" asked Luck, abruptly.

"Nay, I know not; only I sometimes fear that I shall fail to be to him what he would wish, and to you what you have a right to expect. Dear uncle! I know that he thinks me perfection; and I am so weak, so stupid, so useless."

"Nay, you must not say that, Marguerite. You are not useless when you have a wife's duties before you. That is a mission, and so long as you set your mind on accomplishing it you will not be useless."

"That is true, Isaac, and to the best of my ability I will do my duty," she answered, sadly. "But I will frankly confess that I do not look forward to marriage with that pleasure with which a woman should regard so important a step."

"Why not?" he asked, quickly.

She sighed as she answered,

"Because I do not think Nature intended me for a wife."

"Nature intended all women for wives," he returned, "and if they do not get married it is not because Nature intended them to remain single, but because their chance has not occurred."

"That may be true," she answered, "but there are exceptions; and were it not that it is my uncle's desire I would remain as I am."

"I don't think your uncle would be pleased if he thought you held that view," Isaac remarked.

"Perhaps not, but it is nevertheless true, though my uncle will not know it from me. I would die rather than give him one single unhappy moment."

"But surely you have some strong reason for this objection to marriage?"

"My objection is entirely in myself. I am not as other women are. I am a cripple, and those charms that men worship in a woman I have not. I know by instinct that if I were very poor no man would seek me in marriage."

Isaac winced at this. It seemed to him as if it were aimed at him specially.

"You talk strangely," he said.

"I talk truly, nevertheless," she answered, quickly.

"I will not admit that in this case you are right," he returned. "We have long known that it was your uncle's wish that we should be man and wife, and what we have got to do is to learn to love each other."

They were standing by the marble basin of a fountain which rose and fell with a pleasant gurgle, and all around them were exquisite flowers, that made the air odorous with their perfume. It was a fitting scene for love-making, but these two were not lovers.

"Isaac," she said, looking fixedly at him, "answer me a question. If it were not for the large fortune that goes with me, would you seek me in marriage?"

He did not like this question. It drove him into a corner from which there was no retreating. He must either confess the truth or tell a lie. He did not hesitate to do the latter.

"Yes," he answered; "I would."

"Ah, if I could only think that were true," she sighed, "how happy it would make me."

"Why should you doubt it, Marguerite. A woman may have other attractions for a man besides those of mere beauty. There is beauty of mind, and that you have."

She seemed grateful for this compliment. She looked at him tenderly, and laying her hand in his, said,

"You will at least find that my mind is capable of appreciating a husband's love."

After this, the first day of their meeting, they adopted more the acts and ways of lovers, though on Isaac's part there was nothing genuine. He was playing to win a huge stake, and he was playing to perfection; so well, in fact, that she was quite blinded, and it seemed to her that her life was now filled with a great joy that could only find expression in his presence, and then in signs and words of passionate love.

"You are getting fond of that rascal, Marguerite," Mr. Greth said to her playfully one morning, during which the conversation turned on Isaac Luck.

The old man and his niece were strolling on the New Brighton beach. It was Sunday, and the sound of church bells filled the air, which was balmy and genial with warm sunlight. There were golden gleams lying athwart the sea that came creeping up, and creeping up, and then leaping in little wool-white wavelets that broke into spray on the sand. There were gallant ships going to and coming from the ocean. Some with their white sails spread to catch the soft western breeze, and others in charge of snorting tugs. It was a pleasant morning, such as the old man loved, and this favourite retreat of his was quiet and calm on this bright Sabbath-day. Isaac's attachment had never wavered; true in all things he was true in his loves, and he did love New Brighton; possibly because it was there he had made his first bold speculation, when he purchased the wreck of the *Good Luck*; that speculation being the foundation-stone of the huge business he had since constructed with such extraordinary skill and patience.

"Yes, uncle," she answered; "I love Isaac."

"That is good," said the old man, stroking her curls. "But — but does he love you?"

"I think so."

"You think so!" he exclaimed. "Are you not a woman, and ought not a woman to know when a man loves her?"

"Nay, uncle, I am sure he does."

"Ah, that is better. You *must* be sure; for if he does not love every hair on your head he shall never call you wife while I live. *While I live*," he repeated, emphasising the words, and uttering a sigh.

It was seldom he allowed his feelings to betray themselves, but they did on this occasion, and his niece noticed it.

"Why, uncle, you speak quite sadly, as though you thought you were not going to live long," Marguerite remarked, as she tightened her hold upon his arm.

He smiled—though it was a sorrowful smile—as he made answer, "Look at me, my pet; you see my hair is silver, my face is wrinkled, my eyes are dim. When I walk now I have to lean upon you; my strength has waned and my back is bent; all these are potent signs, Marguerite, that my thread wears thin, and may snap at any moment. I should like, therefore, to see you married before my time comes to cease my labours. We will not fix a date for the marriage, but we will say within three months. Eh?"

"If you wish it so, dear uncle," she answered, softly.

"Yes, yes; I do wish it. You see that large house there on the ridge, grey with age like myself, and ivy covered. Well, I am negotiating for the purchase of that. It commands a wide view of the sea, and you can behold from the bedroom windows the ships come and go. I intend to give you that house, and you will christen it *Good Luck House*, and when you sit there watching the ships when I have passed away, you will think—ah, there go the old man's children."

"Ah, uncle, it makes me so sad to hear you talk of passing away," she said, tearfully.

"And yet it must be, it must be, Marguerite. And why should I regret? When my hour strikes, I shall be able to say, 'I rise like a guest from the banquet at last.' I have done my duty to the best of my poor ability, and I am not conscious of ever having wronged any living man. I have tried to earn my rest, and I am growing a little weary, girl, a little weary. I have found life very good; and if I can only be assured that I leave the world slightly better than I found it, I shall lie down with perfect contentment."

Marguerite was moved to sobs. She had never heard him talk in this strain before, or display so much sentiment, and she was sure that he had some feeling, some presentiment, that his days were getting to their end.

He took off his spectacles, and wiped them and his eyes, and then patting her hand that lay upon his arm, he said, in his usual cheery tone,

"Come, let us go in; I feel that I want my morning pipe and glass of beer."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LAYING OF AN OLD MAN IN THE GROUND MUST NOT BE ALLOWED
TO STOP A WEDDING.

IT was about three weeks after the conversation he had had with his niece on the New Brighton beach that Isaac Greth, going into his office one morning as usual as the clocks were striking nine, suddenly reeled against one of the tall stools, and leaning heavily on the edge of a desk, he breathed stertorously. There was a ghastly pallor in his face, and his wrinkled hands opened and shut with nervous twitchings. Several clerks rushed forward to support him, and others went hastily in search of doctors, for it seemed as if "Greth Brothers" was stricken with mortal illness.

"Take—take me into my—office, and—give—me—a little brandy," the old man gasped. Then with a struggle he drew himself up, and a look of defiance came into his pallid face, as if he were saying to himself, "Death, I have no fear of you; I have done my duty."

He found, however, that he could not walk without assistance, and so with a clerk on each side he managed to move very slowly into his private room. There some brandy was administered, and he grew better, and proceeded to open the bundle of correspondence that always awaited him; but in a few minutes he fell forward like a log, and groaned. Fortunately two doctors appeared on the scene at this moment, and in a few minutes a third put in an appearance. They examined the old man, and decided that he had had a slight attack of apoplexy. They did what they could to relieve him, and in the course of half-an-hour he was quite conscious again, though he looked terribly ill. Two of the doctors had gone away to attend to their pressing duties, but the third remained, and gazing up into

his face with a sad smile, Isaac said tremulously, for the attack had affected his voice,

"What's your opinion of my condition, doctor?"

"Well, I think you are not in immediate danger, for you have remarkably strong vitality; but it is imperative that you rest absolutely from all labour."

"Tut, man," said Isaac, a little peevishly. "I am too old to talk of resting. I must get done what I've got to do. What I want to know is, am I likely to live for another month or two?"

"If you would follow my instructions implicitly, you are likely to last another year or two, perhaps several years; but your brain must have rest. The attack this morning is more a premonitory symptom of apoplexy, and should caution you to do all you can to ward off a more serious blow."

"Doctor," said Isaac, sternly, "if I have still a little life left I must employ it. I cannot fritter it away uselessly, in trying to combat my coming end, which, after all, can only be staved off, on your own showing, for a brief space. It is hard to pass away feeling that one's duty is not quite accomplished. I want to see the finishing touch given to my work, and then I am ready. My brain has been too active all my life for it suddenly to give up work at my command. It will only stop when the seal of eternal silence is put upon it."

"Well, I have done my duty in warning you," said the doctor.

"Yes, you have, you have," exclaimed Isaac, quickly, and displaying his characteristic anxiety to give credit for duty done. "But you see, doctor, I am a very wilful old man. I have had my way all my life, and I must have it in this matter."

"Determination is a very good thing," remarked the medical man; "but it is no use being headstrong and determined in the face of overwhelmingly superior forces. If you care for me to advise you I should say, go home at once, and what is more, go to bed, and I will visit you later in the day."

Mr. Greth yielded to this advice, though he did so very reluctantly, and would not have yielded at all but that he felt very ill. When he tried to rise he found that the power of his muscles had almost gone, and he could not stand alone. The doctor, therefore, placed his carriage at the disposal of the old man, who before

leaving the office said to Isaac Luck, "I may want you to come and see me to-night or to-morrow. Hold yourself in readiness to come immediately if I should summon you."

Mr. Greth also sent a special messenger out to Everton to tell Marguerite to come into town at once, and then he allowed himself to be driven home in the doctor's carriage.

It was not very long after that that Marguerite arrived, for the news that her uncle had been seized with illness alarmed her. It was the first time she had ever been to his apartments, for he seemed to have a nervous dread of anyone going to see him there. This gave rise to all sorts of absurd tattle. People said that he was so miserly that he had no furniture and slept on the floor. The statement, like a good many more, was utterly false. Isaac's apartments were furnished in an exceedingly plain, almost severe, manner, but no comfort was lacking, for though the old man detested luxury he was fond of personal comfort. The house belonged to him, though he only occupied four rooms in it. For many years it had been in charge of a man and his wife, who had served Isaac with wonderful fidelity. In addition there were two other servants. So far as he himself was concerned, Isaac troubled his servants but little; but every evening for years, without one interruption, there had assembled in a large room on the ground floor, that had been specially constructed for the purpose, twenty-five old men and women. These were Isaac's pensioners, and they came to enjoy a good, plain and wholesome supper.

These old people were amongst the poorest in the neighbourhood. The number was always limited to twenty-five, and Isaac selected them himself from amongst those who bore the best characters for honesty and sobriety. When vacancies occurred through death or other causes newcomers filled the vacant chairs. Thus did this flinty-hearted, miserly old man cheer the hearts of a quarter of a hundred of his fellow-beings, and this was one of his secrets that, so far as he could, he kept to himself. Isaac Greth never allowed his right hand to know what his left hand did.

As his niece entered his room he was lying on a couch that was drawn up to a cheerful fire. With a little exclamation of alarm she sprang forward, and was on her knees by his side with her hands round his neck in an instant.

"O uncle, dear uncle! you are very, very ill," she cried.

"The summons has come a little sooner than I anticipated, Marguerite," he answered, as he pressed her head to his breast. "But I am not dead yet, my chicken; I am not dead yet. Come, dry those tears. Even when I am dead you must not weep. It is useless to weep for a man who, having done his work, has gone home to his rest."

"O uncle! you are so good, so kind, so noble, so generous, that I cannot afford to lose you," she moaned.

"Hush, silly goose; don't call me such bad names. I don't like them. I am not good and kind and noble and generous. I am only a silly, doting old man, who worships you."

"But tell me, uncle, are you seriously ill?" she asked, with pained anxiety, and looking at him through her tears.

"The doctors say I am, but you know doctors are dreadful people," he answered, with a weary smile.

"Then you shall have rest. I will take you away. You must have the very best doctors that can be got. I am not going to let you die yet. O uncle, what shall I do without you?"

The old man was greatly touched by her tender solicitude, and it seemed as if tears were gathering in his own eyes. But he managed to control himself, and patting her head very lovingly, he said,

"No, my darling; no. I cannot go away. I must not waste the little time that remains to me. Tell me, now, how long will it take to prepare for your marriage?"

"O uncle, do not talk of my marriage at such a time as this."

"Why, my child, the very thing I sent for you for was to speak of your marriage."

"But I would rather that we talked of some arrangements for restoring your own health."

"I am a worn-out machine," he said, sadly, "and no tinkering in the world can keep me going much longer."

"But let me try at any rate," she urged.

"It is useless, useless, dear. Now, answer my question."

"How can I speak of my own marriage, uncle, when you are so ill," she sobbed.

"The subject of your marriage is dearer to me than any other at

this moment," he said, firmly. "It has been the dream of my life, and I must realise it. It is the last act of my life, and I must see it played out."

"Then, if you really wish it, uncle, I will be married whenever you like," she returned, sorrowfully.

"Say in a month, then. I think I can hold out that long," he replied, with grim irony.

"In a month, as you will it," she answered.

"And then as to the wedding, Marguerite. You are a woman, and must have some pretty things."

"I want nothing, uncle, that you do not wish me to have. I would be married in a sack if you desired it."

"But I don't desire it. I have never been to a wedding in my life, but I intend to go to this one if I am living; and so we'll have quite a grand affair of it. Why, I declare, I've a good mind to order old Thompson, the tailor, to make me a new coat. I'll get young again for that day, I declare I will; and you shall buy me a white necktie and white gloves. There shall be no shabbiness about your wedding, my darling, I tell you. Even old Greth shall come out of his shell for once."

He had spoken in a forced vein of drollery, but it was evident he did not feel droll. His withered face was filled with an expression of pained anxiety, as though he thought that this, the last act of his life, the marrying of his niece to his protégé, would not be accomplished before he was summoned away.

He regretted now that he had put the event off so long; but it had been done in deference to his great anxiety to ensure the happiness of his niece and her husband. He wanted them to know each other thoroughly, to detect each other's flaws and weaknesses, before they linked themselves 'for good. Nobody but himself knew how earnestly he desired their happiness, and how he had striven to make it a certainty, so far as a human being could do.

For months this marriage had never been absent from his thoughts. It was his pet scheme. He had first begun to think it over years and years ago, and during all those years it had been an ever present idea. He believed that the union would bring happiness to Marguerite, and for that he had yearned with an intensity of longing that was almost remarkable; and he also believed that

by making Isaac Luck his heir, the business would still go on and flourish and prosper as it had done under his regime. But now it seemed as if the shadow of death had already fallen upon him at the very moment that he was about to accomplish his pet project. This marriage would be the crowning work of his life, and when that work was done he would be fully prepared to lay down his burden and rest.

Marguerite did not fail to notice that his humour was forced, and that in his mind he was pained and troubled. She laid her soft cheek against his withered one, and her white hand played with his silver hair.

"Ah, uncle," she said, in a sweetly tender way, "without your presence my marriage would be dull and cheerless. And if it should please God to take you before the day that is fixed for the ceremony, I shall postpone my wedding for a year at least."

"No, no," he cried quickly, taking her hand between his trembling hands, and kissing her on the forehead, "you must do nothing of the sort. The laying of an old worn-out man in the ground must not be allowed to stop a wedding. It makes me sick when I think of the nonsense and hypocrisy that are practised in this respect. I have lived my time, and why should I be mourned? Like a cast-off garment that has seen its service, I should be done with. I would rest my claims to be remembered upon the fact that I have struggled with all my heart and with all my soul to be honest."

"Why do you put such a low estimate upon yourself, dear uncle?" Marguerite asked, lovingly. "You have done noble and great deeds, but have hidden them——."

"Hush, you minx," he cried; "how dare you lay such heavy charges to me? I am only a flinty old man, with no heart save that which he has to love you with. But now about this wedding. Tell your mother to see to it. I have all but completed the purchase of the house at New Brighton for you, and if I have strength you shall go with me to see it in a few days. I love that place, and I hope you will love it too. I wish when I am dead they would dig my grave in the sand there, so that the tide could always wash over it, and you could see the spot from your window. I should like to lie close to where the ships pass to and fro, for I

have loved them. They are my children. There, there, dry those tears. I'm a stupid old fellow to make you cry. I want to see smiles and sunshine in your face, not tears. Now tell me, Marguerite, does your woman's nature assure you that Isaac Luck truly loves you?"

"Yes, uncle, it does."

"I am glad to hear you say so. His career so far has not pleased me. I am a little disappointed in him. But I blame myself a good deal. I took the lad from school too young. I sent him to India too young. But regrets are all useless now. If he makes you a good husband that is all that is required, and if he doesn't I'll haunt him."

"I am sure, dear uncle, we shall be very, very happy together. I shall strive to do my duty to him, and I know he will do the same."

"Ay, I know you'll do your duty, child," the old man cried, with a burst of enthusiasm; "but, but—. Well, he is not as bright in disposition as I should like. He seems to me to be constantly brooding. And he does not love me."

"O uncle——!"

"Nay, I don't mean anything bad against him, but I know he does not love me."

"Why do you think that, uncle?"

"From many causes, girl. My own instincts, for one thing. But there again I am to blame. I have been, perhaps, too stern with him. I have allowed him to be too long away. When I was younger I used to be vain enough to think that my judgment was almost infallible. Now I think that all my life long I have been making mistakes. But I must not talk of these things. We are wasting good time. Now, go you down to old Mrs. Turnbull, my housekeeper, and tell her that to-day I intend to dine at home, and that a lady is going to dine with me."

"Who is the lady, uncle?"

"One I dote on. Yourself, you puss. You will give Mrs. Turnbull instructions to cook a dish of chops in her very best style, and woe betide her if they are not done to a turn."

Marguerite kissed her uncle, and then went downstairs to execute her commission, and when he was alone the old man covered his eyes with his hand, and murmured,

"The end draws very near. I feel it, and yet I have so much to do. Poor old brain, poor broken old heart, keep on your work a little longer; but a few weeks more and then your task will be done, and you can stop. It is not much I ask of you; grant that little."

When his niece returned to the room he was quite cheerful again, and indulged in some of his pleasant banter.

Marguerite felt quite pleased in thus being able to wait upon her uncle, and she manifested the most intense eagerness to do something for him. For half-a-century he had been austere in his treatment of himself, and had rigidly denied himself anything like luxury; but now here was his niece suggesting all sorts of delicacies, and he was actually yielding. When the frugal meal of chops that *were* done to a turn had been discussed, and enjoyed by Marguerite more than any of the grand dinners she was used to at home, she went out and purchased a handsome dressing-gown for her uncle, and a large and luxurious easy-chair, for these were two articles he had never troubled himself about. Then she made him some soothing and palatable drink of barley-water and lemons, because he complained of thirst. In the course of the afternoon the doctor came again, and he said he thought that the patient was doing very well, but he told Marguerite that it was imperative that he should go away and rest. "And if you have any influence with your uncle," he said, "you should insist on his doing this."

"I'm going to take you away, uncle," Marguerite exclaimed, quite joyfully, when the doctor had gone. "I shall take you to Wiesbaden, where papa and I went last summer. Now, it's no use your saying you won't go, because you will; for you know I'm just going to do as I like with you. So there now."

He laughed and seemed greatly pleased.

"You saucy puss," he cried. "Have I lived all these years in the world to be ordered about by a young minx like you. No, my darling. Not Wiesbaden; it is too far off. But I tell you what you shall do. I'll complete the purchase of the New Brighton house to-morrow, and you shall go down to Smith and Jones, the upholsterers, and tell them that they are to furnish the place within three days. Then you shall take me there, my chicken, as

soon as ever the house is ready, and I shall be able to sit at the window, and watch the ships and hear the sea. You can choose whatever you like for the house. You need spare no expense, for it is to be a gift to you, and it shall be a good one. There, now, will that arrangement suit you?"

"O uncle, you are so kind," cried Marguerite, feeling overjoyed at the thought that she would get him away, even if it were only to New Brighton, and make him take the rest the doctor prescribed. When she was kissing him before going home, he said,

"You and your mother can see about the furniture first thing to-morrow, and tell your father that he must come here to-morrow without fail, at four o'clock, as I have some important business to transact with him."

"Can you not put this important business off, uncle?" she asked, with some concern. "I am sure it will wait."

"No, my pet; I cannot put it off, and it won't wait. It is a something I have already delayed dangerously long. I must delay no longer."

His manner and look convinced her that he was determined on this point, and that it would be useless for her to try and argue him out of it, and so she took her leave.

When he was once more alone Isaac got off the couch. He was very weak and tottering, but he struggled across the room to a side table, on which stood a large old-fashioned German writing-desk. With palsied hand he drew a bunch of keys from his pocket, and opened the desk, and then a secret drawer, from which he took a bundle of yellow, time-stained letters, that were tied together with a piece of blue ribbon. He undid these letters, which were written in German, in a woman's hand, in small and neat writing.

"It's like opening a tomb," Isaac murmured, "but I have kept this mouldering secret too long, too long."

He glanced over the letters, reading many of them through. He was greatly agitated, and he frequently wiped his eyes. Those who only knew the Isaac Greth of Greth Brothers, with his seemingly hard, stern face, and his brusque manners, would hardly have recognised him in this weeping old man, who under the

influence of some revived, dormant memory was like a sorrow-stricken child.

In a little while he tied the letters up again, and placed them back in their receptacle. Then he wrote a short letter to his lawyer, telling that gentleman to complete the purchase of the New Brighton house to-morrow, without fail; and, having settled this business, he wrote the following note to his protégé:—

“You will hold yourself free to-morrow to be with me here at four o’clock precisely, as the time has come when I feel I can tell you something about your parents that will no doubt interest you. Do not fail to come, for what I have to tell you is of great importance to yourself, and will not fail to colour the whole of your after life.”

He folded this letter up, and sealed it with the great seal that always dangled from his fob pocket, attached to a bit of black ribbon, and that done, he pulled out his great round-faced, time-worn silver watch, that was as plain and pronounced as he himself.

He looked at the time. It was four o’clock. He rested his head wearily on his hand, and sighed sadly.

“To-morrow!” he mused. “To-morrow; shall I have a to-morrow? To-morrow is a long way off to old eyes that are closing on earthly scenes. Twenty-four hours hence, when Isaac comes, he may find me dead, and then he will never know my secret, for I cannot write it. Well, God’s will be done.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

THAT WOMAN WAS YOUR MOTHER.

THE gloomy forebodings that Isaac Greth had had, that he might not live till the morrow, were not realised, for the morrow came and found him not only alive but better in health. As the doctor had said, he had strong vitality. He was wiry and tough. He belonged to that class of men who require a good many buffets to knock them out of existence. Nevertheless, it was apparent that Mr. Greth had been sorely shaken. The buffets he had already received had partially wrecked him; and though he might continue to float a little while longer, it could only be as a rickety hulk, that the next blow would break up.

The attack had not only seriously weakened him, but it had brought a sad, haggard, weary look into his face. If anyone had been asked to guess his age he would have said it was nearer eighty than seventy. There was the peculiar paralytic shaking of the limbs, and the cold, bloodless appearance of the hands, which, together with the bowed, enfeebled form, gave the appearance of extreme age. He had, indeed, altered very much—a certain sign that he was breaking up fast. Like most men of strong vitality and strong mental powers he retained his faculties with almost marvellous acuteness. His eyesight had never been very good, but it was no worse now than when he first mounted spectacles, more than fifty years ago. His hearing was good, and his brain clear and quick as usual. The attack of illness, however, had affected his speech, and he spoke with a seeming hesitancy, but this was due to the tongue having lost some of its power. That morning saw him as keen for work as ever he had been, and he actually determined to go down to the office—a determination he would have carried out had not the doctor arrived just in time, and

so strongly inveighed against it that the old man gave in. Then the doctor was followed almost immediately by Marguerite, who, when she heard what her uncle's intentions had been, gave him a very severe scolding, and vowed that if he were not obedient, she would not come and see him again. In the face of this terrible threat, the old man, of course, became very submissive and humble, but had his revenge by calling her a pretty tyrant and a minx.

Then came Mr. Greth's lawyer, and while the two transacted business, Marguerite went down to Mrs. Turnbull's kitchen to concoct little delicacies wherewith to tempt her uncle's appetite.

The legal business was rather a long affair, but the lawyer went at last, and when Marguerite came to her uncle's room again he seemed quite cheerful, and cried,

"Come here, you pussy; come here, while I kiss you. My mind feels lighter now, for I have settled several things, and amongst others, the house business. Ah, here is your mother"—this as Mrs. Jacob Greth entered; "now then, you can both go down to Smith and Jones, and select the furniture, and tell them that they must do the whole thing in three days."

In the course of half-an-hour, during which Mrs. Greth had talked over many things with her brother-in-law, she and Marguerite went off to the upholsterers. Then came a head-clerk from the office to get instructions and to ask many important questions, and he told the head of the firm that the business was confused and deranged through his absence, but that they hoped to get all in order again in a few days, and that he had no doubt they would be able to get on very well without him.

Mr. Greth gave no sign that this remark affected him until his clerk had gone, and then resting his head on his hand he mused,

"They can get on very well without me? Aye, so it is, and a man's vanity is checked. After thirty odd years, scarcely without a break, they are a little deranged now, but will get over it in two or three days, and be able to do without me. Does it take so little time to fill up a gap caused by a man's departure? Nearly forty years of toil, and ere yet the labourer is cold in the ground the world swings on again, and he is forgotten. The pillar of the house is taken away, but the house does not fall. That man who thinks he cannot be done without is a fool."

The fore part of the day wore itself out, and the clocks told off the hour of four, and scarcely had the sounds died away before Isaac Luck and Jacob Greth arrived. They both knew that the head of the firm would not tolerate unpunctuality. That was one of the things that Isaac was a despot about. To be unpunctual was to offend him seriously.

Isaac Luck came on foot, although he walked in the glare, so to speak, of half a million of money. Jacob Greth came in a superb carriage, on which was painted a crest and motto, and which was drawn by two magnificent horses, that had cost their owner five hundred guineas. Jacob wore a large coat, trimmed with costly fur, and he looked a confirmed valetudinarian. There was a bloodless appearance about the face, and a general air of feebleness. The two brothers had not met for some time, as Jacob had been away. Jacob was very shocked to see the changed appearance of his brother. There was perfect accord and perfect sympathy between them. During all the years they had been in partnership they had never once had a word of difference. Each tolerated the other's foibles. Isaac knew that Jacob was passionately fond of show and ostentation, and Jacob knew that Isaac wasn't, but was fond of doing what the world called eccentric things. But this diversity caused no breach between them. Jacob was an ordinary and commonplace man, Isaac was an extraordinary and original man ; but, like the positive and negative poles of a battery, they were quite in harmony. Jacob looked up to his brother with something like awesome respect, as in fact all the family did. He was admittedly the genius of the family, and, as family geniuses generally are, he was held in a sort of reverence, though very possibly had he been a poor genius things might have been different ; but it was he who had raised the family from the gutter, given them wealth, and rescued the name from obscurity. These deeds entitled him to rank as the head, and to command deference and respect. But there had never been the slightest cavil as to the position Isaac should occupy. He was the leader by force of character and circumstances, and this was conceded from the first.

Possibly, however, no one in the family had such a profound regard, such a deep, silent worship of Isaac as Jacob had. Whatever his brother said was as good as law to him, and he would no

more have thought of gainsaying his brother than he would have thought of standing on his head. Jacob was fond of gaud and glitter, but in himself he was a quiet and rather simple man, with a good deal of natural refinement and a deferential manner. Some people perhaps would have called him weak. So he was, if compared with Isaac; but there was one thing they both had in common with the rest of the family, and that was sterling honesty. Their father and mother had been poor and humble, but they had been noted for honesty and uprightness.

The meeting between the two brothers now was warm and cordial, and Jacob was almost moved to tears by his brother's condition. Luck expressed sympathy also, but it was stilted and artificial, and the quick perception of Isaac could scarcely have failed to note it.

"I daresay you wonder why I have sent for you, Jacob," Isaac said.

"Well, if you had not sent I fully intended to have come to-day, for I was much alarmed when I heard you were so ill," Jacob answered.

"Well, the reason is," Isaac went on, "I have a story to tell you about that lad's parents. He has a direct interest in it, and there are many reasons why you should hear it. Give me your hand, Jacob, and you, Luck. There, that is it. Now help me to rise. So. You see I am not so youthful as I was. My limbs are rusty. There, there; I can stand alone. Thank you, thank you."

He walked over in a tottering way to his desk, which he unlocked, and took therefrom something, carefully wrapped up in tissue paper. He went back to his seat near the table, and with very shaky fingers he unrolled the tissue paper. There was much of it, and the two men wondered what he was going to show them. At last he revealed his treasure. It was an ivory miniature of a lady.

This miniature was beautifully painted, and it represented a pleasant-looking, but by no means a handsome woman, of about five-and-twenty. The face was of a Teutonic cast, and the features would have been pronounced coarse by connoisseurs of beauty. She was a fair woman, with blue eyes, and two enormous plaits of hair hanging over her shoulders.

With the miniature was another little packet, which was also opened, and a tress of fair hair was brought to view.

Isaac Greth laid these two articles on the table, and turning to Luck, said, with some display of emotion, "See, boy, there is the portrait of a woman who was called Marguerite Gnosselius, and there is a piece of Marguerite Gnosselius's hair. That woman was your mother."

Luck caught the miniature up and gazed upon it intently; and then he looked at the tress of hair.

Isaac watched his protégé's face narrowly, but the face had an unreadable look, although it did express some emotion and surprise.

"It's strange, isn't it," remarked Isaac, "to be looking on the picture of a woman you never saw in the flesh, and yet who brought you into the world?"

"It is, indeed," Luck remarked, in an abstracted way.

"Well, sit down," said Isaac, "and I'll tell you that poor woman's story. Marguerite Gnosselius was a German. She was born on the banks of the grand old Rhine, in a little village between Coblenz and Bingen. No heralds proclaimed her birth, and there was no firing of salutes, for her people were about as humble as they could be. Her father was a cobbler, and her mother was a washerwoman. So you see, boy, you can't claim to have descended from noble ancestry."

"May I suggest that it would be better for you not to tell me these things?" said Luck, feeling some slight annoyance at the way in which Isaac spoke.

"No, you may not," exclaimed Mr. Greth, with something like anger. "You wouldn't have me tell you that you had descended from princes, would you, when you can go no higher than a cobbler and washerwoman?"

Luck made no reply, for he knew that this strange old man still stood between him and the half-million of money; but he felt angry, nevertheless, though he was careful to conceal his anger. He was foolish enough to think that Mr. Greth was mocking him.

Isaac continued,

"Margaret Gnosselius was one of seventeen children. So you may imagine that the washerwoman and the cobbler couldn't do much for their big brood. Some went for soldiers, some went to America, some tilled the land, but Marguerite did as many a needy

German has done to his advantage—she came to England, and she entered into the service of a good English family, as a nurse to some children. You think I speak slightly of your mother, eh? Let me disabuse your mind if you do. But what I want is to take the pride out of you, so that when I am gone, and you have got that half-million of money and the business, you needn't go sticking up a coat of arms, as though your mother was a Grand Duke's daughter. She was simply a nurse; but mark you this, she was one of Nature's noble women. God gave her a disposition that was all but perfect. It happened one summer's evening that she was coming out of Hyde Park with the two children she was nurse to, when she was attracted by an old grey-headed beggar-woman, in rags and tatters, who was sitting in the gutter. Marguerite stopped and gave that woman a shilling. A man, an intimate and well-loved friend of mine, a German also, was standing near, and witnessed the deed. He was much struck by it. It seemed to him that for a nurse-girl to give a beggar-woman so large a sum as a shilling was an act of generosity as uncommon as it was noble. So my friend spoke to her, and his surprise and pleasure were great when he found that she was a compatriot.

"May I ask the name of your friend?" said Luck, growing a little excited.

"No, you may not. You must have patience, and in due time I will tell it to you. Now, it was one of the most natural things possible that these two foreigners, meeting like this in the great world of London, should talk of their fatherland and of the Rhine, which they both knew so well. My friend found the woman to be amiable and cheerful, and he discovered by probing her that she had a heart infinitely too large for her slender purse. Well, when they parted that night it was on the understanding that they should meet again."

"I knew my friend's secrets, and I knew this one, and I said to him, 'That woman is a gem, and she will make you or any man a worthy and honest wife.' My friend felt that himself, but he was poor then and could not see his way clear to burden himself with the responsibility of a wife, and possibly a family. He was an ambitious man, and he wanted to rise; but he told me that when he had bettered his position, as he hoped to do shortly, he would take

Marguerite Gnosselius to wife if she would have him. They met again and again, and so came to love each other.

"You can judge from that portrait whether your mother was good-looking or not. Her face wouldn't have pleased an artist, but she had a beauty of mind that an artist could not have painted, but which attracted my friend like a magnet. And then her big heart was irresistible. He worshipped that. They were rather a strange couple because they were not quite like other lovers. They didn't spend their time gazing up at the stars and grinning at the moon, but they were practical, and talked of the time when they should be man and wife, and they made plans for the future and began to put by money. However, poor silly creatures, they were very human after all, and your coming into the world was like a thunderclap to them, and a few weeks later this thunderclap stunned and struck my friend into the dust, for his Marguerite, who was too good for this world, left it."

Luck's face was very pale with suppressed excitement. He was listening to the story with strained feelings and intense eagerness. The revelation that he was an illegitimate child did not surprise him, because he had always suspected it. The very circumstances of his life had seemed somehow to point to that.

Mr. Greth was also affected, and he had to strengthen and refresh himself with some of the barley-water his niece had made for him.

"The unexpected death of your mother," Isaac went on, "was a blow from which her lover did not rise for a long time. The world changed for him. He used to drift aimlessly along, as it were, with the ceaseless stream of human beings; and as if he could not realise that she was dead he would peer into every face that passed as though he hoped to see hers amongst them. Ah, poor fellow! It was very sad that he with all his fine feelings should thus suddenly be left like a lonely waif, even in that great crowd in the busy world of London. All the walks that ever he had taken with her he took over and over again; going backwards and forwards, restless and sorrow-stricken, and possibly with some sort of foolish, vague notion that she would meet him again, if it was only as a ghost. But the grave held her fast, and would not let even her spirit come to him. She had been to him a vision of all that was pure and good and womanly; but she had passed away like

an evanescent gleam of sunlight on an April day, leaving a great gloom. Her going made a tremendous gap in his heart, and there and then he registered a vow that never should that gap be filled so long as his life should last."

"And did my father keep that vow?" Luck asked, as the old man paused.

"Yes, faithfully. He was an honest man and not likely to break his word. He had been guilty of an indiscretion, and his error preyed upon his mind. I know for a certainty that almost from the first moment of seeing your mother he resolved that she should be his wife. His fault and error was that he waited. He and she should have married, poor as they were. They loved not wisely but too well."

"Am I at liberty now to ask what the name of my father was?"

"Yes. It was Isaac Greth."

"Isaac Greth!" echoed Luck. "Then *you* are my father?"

"Yes."

Jacob was silent with astonishment, and Isaac was silent by reason of many conflicting emotions; but perhaps the predominant one of these was joy, because now it seemed to him a certainty that his position was secure. It is a singular fact that although he had always thought there was some mystery about his birth, he had never once thought it likely that Mr. Greth was his father. What had occurred to him once or twice was that he might be the son of one of Isaac's sisters. And now, after all these years, he had come to know his father in the man whom he had despised, whom he had treated with disdain, whom he had cruelly deceived.

"Well, Isaac, you do astonish me," was all Jacob could say then.

Luck put forth his hand, and betraying in his voice the agitation he felt, he said,

"Father, I feel proud to be the son of such a man!"

Mr. Greth was very much moved, and tears trickled down his cheeks. He took the outstretched hand and held it.

"I don't want you to be proud of me," he said, "but I want you to remember your mother with pride, and to honour her name. She was a grand woman, and the world has never been the same to me since she left it. I have kept my secret, never being able to bring my mind to that point to tell you. Perhaps I have been

wrong. I fear I have, because you might have been a better lad if I had told you. Your dear mother lies buried in a quiet little churchyard close to London. Never once since her death have I missed going up on the anniversary of that dreadful day, and laying a wreath upon her grave. But I shall never go again until you take me, for I have directed that my body is to be buried with her. The anniversary is close at hand, and if I am not then dead you shall go and lay the wreath for me this year."

He paused as he wiped his eyes, and uttered two or three little sobs, and then, resuming his old, half-cynical style again, he said,

"There, you didn't think or suppose that there was so much sentiment in me. But it is passed. I am Isaac Greth again. And now, young man, as to your future. Almost from the very first moment that my dear brother's girl was born, I said my boy and that girl shall be man and wife, and from the hour that I said that I consecrated myself to making a fortune that I might leave you rich. I called you Luck, because *Luck* was the name of the wreck I first purchased and laid the foundation for my business, and you must not discredit your name. Brother, you will greet your nephew; soon he will be your son-in-law, and you will take note that I have made him my heir. He will become possessed of half-a-million of money and my share in the business. And now, boy, I have this to say. I charge you solemnly, charge you as a dying man, to cherish and love with all your heart and soul the wife I am going to give you. She was named Marguerite at my request, and I named her so because it was the name of your dead mother. And I resolved that that child should, so far as she could, supply your mother's place. She has grown to be to me an idol, and I worship her. Isaac Luck, my idol I give into your keeping as a sacred trust. Let never a shadow come over her of your making; let never a pang of your causing come into her heart; let never a harsh word to her cross your lips. She is as true as steel, as sterling as gold, as gentle as a dove. Guard her, cherish her, honour her—do you hear my words?"

He pointed his quivering finger at him, his eyes were aglow, and his pallid cheeks were flushed; and when he had paused to recover his breath, he added, almost fiercely, "Fail you to do these things, and my money will be a curse to you and not a blessing!"

Luck was filled with a nameless, nervous fear. That stern face, those flashing eyes, and that pointing, quivering finger, appalled him. He cowed and shrank within himself, for his guilt smote him. His conscience made him quail in the presence of that rugged honesty, and the unswerving fidelity and truth of his strange father. But his cowardly heart would not let him confess his fault. He felt that he had gone too far to retreat, and he saw death written on his father's face. "In a little while," he thought, "he will be gone, and then I shall be quite secure." It was with difficulty he could command his voice so as to speak with steadiness and a show of earnestness. But at last he said,

"Father, I will endeavour to the best of my ability to be all that you desire me to be."

At this moment Mrs. Jacob Greth and her daughter returned. The old man stretched his arms, and cried, "Come here, Marguerite, my dove." As she flew into his arms, and he held her tightly, with one hand on her head and her head pressed to his heart, he said, like a sobbing child, "Don't hate me, Marguerite, don't hate me; but you see there, as your future husband—your own cousin, and my son!"

CHAPTER XXX.

ONE LINK IS FOUND : BUT MANY ARE LOST.

THE letter Mrs. Shadwell had received from America caused her some little anxiety as to how she should act. It seemed reasonable to presume that the writer, Mary Skeats (*nee* Dotbelle), knew something that might be worth learning by those interested in the future welfare of the child Petrel. This woman said she was the widow of a man called Caleb Skeats, that she had married him in Calcutta, and that he was drowned at sea.

Here, then, were several links in the chain that was missing, or otherwise they were singular coincidences. It is true that the name of the vessel that was lost in the Bay of Bengal had not been ascertained by the mate of the *Pearl* when he rescued the unfortunate woman and her child, nor her port of departure or destination. But being in the Bay of Bengal it was not unreasonable to suppose she had come from some Indian port. If that was granted, was not that port likely to be Calcutta? If so, and bearing in mind that Caleb Skeats was drowned at sea, might he not have been drowned in the wreck of the unknown ship? His widow said the ship he sailed in had never been heard of again. This, at least, was a remarkable circumstance. And if this lost man was the Caleb Skeats who had put his name on the back of the hundred-pound note, was it not likely that his widow would be able to give some information?

Mrs. Shadwell did not feel competent to work the problem out by herself, and so she appealed once more to her adviser, John Robinson. She would have appealed to her husband if she could have done so, but he had not written a single line since his departure, although he had been gone over nine months. She had got a little anxious about this silence, and she had applied to the owners

of the ship in which he had sailed for some information about him, and they had told her that they had received a report that the doctor was ill in the hospital at Calcutta, but was getting better, and as his ship had been ordered to San Francisco for a cargo, he would probably go with her.

Mrs. Shadwell was much concerned at this news, and she was also much puzzled, for if the doctor was living, why had he not written? Surely during nine months he must have had ample time and opportunity for writing. And if he were not living, it was strange that either she or the owners had not received some information of his death. At any rate, as he had placed himself out of her reach she could not appeal, and she applied to John Robinson instead.

Mrs. Shadwell said in her letter to this gentleman, "Do not trouble to come here specially, but tell me what I want to know in a letter."

Mr. John Robinson, however, did not by any means consider it a trouble to go to Liverpool specially on Mrs. Shadwell's account. But, on the contrary, he was extremely gratified at being able to render so small a service. He was not an idle man by any means, but nevertheless he could find time to place at the disposal of so old a friend as Mrs. Shadwell. The result was he once more found himself under the hospitable roof of Lucknow House, much to Mrs. Shadwell's delight. It is no use disguising the fact, she was delighted. She was delighted for two reasons—firstly, because she was glad to know that the old breach that existed at one time between her and John existed no longer; and secondly, because she respected John's opinions, and had come to feel that in difficult matters he was the most reliable friend she could go to. Of course, she had not always thought so. For instance, when she threw him over in favour of Lieutenant Vavasour. It is true she was a girl then. She was a woman now, and much wiser.

She and Mr. Robinson talked the matter over very seriously, arguing it out exactly as she had argued it out with herself, and with the result that he advised her to write to Mrs. Skeats and ask her if on board of the ship that her husband had sailed in there were a woman and child. If so, and she was in a position to give any information as to who the woman and child were, and could

come to England by the next mail, all her expenses would be paid, and she would receive the reward of fifty pounds.

It seemed to John Robinson very much better that this woman should come to England, because if the Caleb Skeats whose signature appeared on the back of the half of the bank-note was her husband, she would probably be able to recognise the handwriting, and that would be a very strong link indeed.

This matter settled and agreed upon, Mrs. Shadwell lost no time in despatching the letter, and as she had some friends staying with her at the time, including the pretty cousin, Miss Darlington, she had spoken of, she pressed John to remain for a few days. And she added artfully, as an inducement,

"You know, John, my cousin is quite an eligible young woman, and you should make up to her."

"The eligible young woman does not exist that I would make up to," he answered.

As he happened to be the only gentleman in the party, amongst whom there were three good-looking young ladies, including Miss Darlington, he had rather an enjoyable time of it, and he was unanimously voted by the ladies to be "a splendid fellow." There is no doubt that this vote was well-deserved, for John Robinson was in many ways a splendid fellow. Not only did he understand to perfection the art of making himself agreeable to ladies, without the slightest affectation and in the most chivalrous manner, but he was thoroughly manly, and if there is one thing more than another that a woman likes in a man, it is manliness.

When he took his departure there was a universal chorus of regret. On the morning that he was going away he had some conversation with Mrs. Shadwell, on the old subject, and incidentally he asked,

"By the way, have you heard from your husband lately?"

At first Mrs. Shadwell hesitated how to answer, but quickly resolved to make no concealment.

"No, John, I have not; and what will surprise you more, is, I have never had a line from him since he went away."

"Indeed! What is the reason of that?"

"I can give you no good reason, unless it is that when we parted we did not part very good friends."

As she said this she observed that in John's face came an expression that was half pain, half anger—an expression that was quite foreign to it. She thought he was going to make some answer, but he didn't. He talked on quite another subject, and, promising to return soon, took his leave.

Mrs. Shadwell had not long to wait for an answer from Mrs. Skeats. It came by the return mail, and was to the following effect:—"There *were* a lady and child on board the ship that my husband sailed in from Calcutta. As I am much interested in the fate of that poor lady and her child, and can give you a lot of information about them, I will leave for England by the mail following this, so that you may expect me a week later."

That intervening week was one of suspense coupled with anxiety to Mrs. Shadwell, and she felt she could not do better than write to Mr. Robinson and ask him to come up and be present when Mary Skeats arrived. Of course John accepted the invitation; and his frequent journeys to Liverpool now caused his mother to chide him a little. She did not like him to go from home, and especially to Mrs. Shadwell's, whom she had never quite forgiven for jilting her son. But much as John loved his mother, he felt that he could not resist the invitation.

Mary Skeats did not arrive until eight days after her letter, as the steamer made a long passage, being detained by bad weather.

When she presented herself, at Lucknow House, she was neatly and plainly attired. She looked a little older than when we last saw her, but she was still very pretty. Mrs. Shadwell had somehow expected to see a middle-aged or old woman, and was slightly surprised to behold a young and pretty one. Mrs. Shadwell had arranged for Mrs. Skeats to stay at Lucknow House, so, when she had refreshed and rested herself, she went to the breakfast-room, where Mrs. Shadwell and John Robinson awaited her coming.

"I understand, Mrs. Skeats, that you are in a position to give us some information concerning a lady and little boy who were on board of the same ship as your husband?" John Robinson said.

"Yes, sir. My husband was the captain and sole owner of that unfortunate ship," Mrs. Skeats answered, with a deep sigh.

"Was your husband an American?" asked Mrs. Shadwell.

"Yes, ma'am."

"And what was the name of the ship?" queried John.

"The *Mayblossom*." Mary cried a little here, but apologised, and recovering herself quickly, said, "Excuse me for displaying my feelings, but the loss of my poor husband was a great blow to me. We had only been married a very short time, and I have never been able to dismiss from my thoughts that he was the victim of foul play."

"You will of course know your husband's handwriting?" Mrs. Shadwell observed, as she took the half of the bank-note from her desk.

"Oh, yes, perfectly well. He wrote rather a cramped hand."

"Is that his signature?"

"Yes. There is no doubt about it," answered Mary Skeats, excitedly. "How did you get this note, ma'am?"

"Perhaps," put in John, "perhaps it would be as well for Mrs. Skeats to tell her story first from the beginning, whatever she has to tell. If she recognises that signature as her husband's, it affords us a very important link."

"I begin to think now that all my fears have not been groundless," Mary answered, as she wiped her eyes again. "I said in Calcutta that I was sure there had been some foul play, but I was laughed at."

"What was the name of the lady who was on board your husband's ship, Mrs. Skeats?" John asked.

"Mrs. Luck, sir."

"Luck—that is rather a curious name."

"Yes, sir, it is. She was formerly a Miss Lena Cheston, I believe. Supposing I tell you what I know, from the very beginning?"

"Yes; do, please."

"When I first met Mrs. Luck I was lady's-maid with a lady named Behrens. Her husband was a very rich Jew, and was well known in Calcutta. My mistress visited at the house of Mrs. Luck, and I used to go with her, and it was through that, that I became acquainted with Mrs. Luck. She was quite a young woman and very pretty, and was nursing her first baby. She had only been married about a year, but I soon learned that she was not very happy with her husband."

"How did you learn that?" asked Mrs. Shadwell.

"She told it to me herself. It appears that she had no friends or relations, and an intimacy sprang up between us. Her husband was very wild, and a great friend of Mr. Behrens, who, I believe now, was a perfect monster. Mrs. Luck couldn't bear him, and it was through him, I believe, that she and her husband quarrelled."

"Was her husband a young man?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was his Christian name?"

"Isaac."

"Then her husband was not with her on board of the ship?" asked Mrs. Shadwell.

"Oh, no ; they were separated."

"Separated !"

"Yes. It appears that during her husband's absence one day Mr. Behrens went to her house and insulted her. This led to a quarrel with her husband, who was so wrapped up in Behrens that he would not tell him that he must not come again. The result was that they agreed to separate, but I understand that her husband told her that the separation was only to be temporary, and that the real cause of the separation was money difficulties. However, if he was in difficulties it did not seem very like it, for he took very nice apartments for her at a boarding-house kept by a widow lady. It was a house much resorted to by captains and officers of ships. She became very ill here, for she had made great sacrifices to marry her husband, and the way he had treated her almost broke her heart. I used to go frequently to see her at this house, and I first met Mr. Skeats there, where he had been lodging for some time. He came from the same town as I did in America, and knew my people very well."

"What was Mr. Skeats doing in Calcutta at that time?"

"He had brought horses from Australia, but his ship had been damaged in a storm, and was laid up. She was only a small barque, and he was sailing her entirely on his own account. He intended to try and get a cargo for either England or America, and after that he was going to sell his vessel and buy a larger one. He was very anxious to get away from Calcutta, as he did not like it ; and so I gave up my situation and we were married. It was not very long after this that Mrs. Luck heard that her husband had left Calcutta

and gone to Bombay, where he had been stationed for some years before. She was very much pained, because she thought he quite intended to desert her now. But one day Mrs. Behrens came to see her, and said that Mr. Luck wished his wife to join him in Bombay. Poor thing; she was rejoiced at that, for she was very fond of him, far fonder than he deserved."

"How old was her little boy at this time?" Mrs. Shadwell asked.

"Well, ma'am, I should say he would be about eighteen months."

"Then, how was it she came to sail in your husband's ship without you?" queried John.

"Well, sir, it was this way. My husband told me one day that he had got a charter for his vessel. He was to go round to Bombay in ballast and bring back a cargo of coals."

"Who chartered the ship?" asked John.

"Mr. Behrens."

"What was Mr. Behrens?"

"He was an agent and a stevedore—in fact, all sorts of things. He had a good deal to do with shipping, and used to coal a great many of the tugboats on the river. My husband was quite glad that he had got this charter, because his ship had been idle for a long time, and he said he was to be paid very well for the voyage, and that Mr. Behrens was going to put his own crew on board. It was decided that I was to go with him, but I had been suffering for some time from a small abscess in the neck, the result of a pin scratch. I had been under medical treatment for it, and when the doctor heard that I was going to sea he advised me not to, for the abscess might get very much worse and mortify, if it was not properly attended to. So, as the voyage was only a short one, and my husband wouldn't be long away, I decided, with his consent, to remain behind. About three days before the *Mayblossom* sailed, Mrs. Behrens called on Mrs. Luck to tell her that her husband had written to Mr. Behrens to ask him to arrange for a passage for her by the first ship going, and she brought a hundred-pound Bank of England note, which she said Mr. Luck had sent in case his wife wanted any money. Mrs. Behrens suggested my husband's ship, and as she knew my husband well the poor thing was very glad of the chance. The next day Mrs. Luck wanted to change the bank-note, but nobody in the house could do it, so my husband endorsed it and sent

her up to his own agent in the town. But it appears that on the way she altered her mind, and when she came back she told me that she found that she had quite enough money for her wants, and that she would keep the note until she got to Bombay, and then invest it in some way, or put it into a bank for her child. When the ship was ready for sea I went down the river with her a little way, and I was much struck by the crew that had been put on board. There were eleven men altogether, including the mate, who was an Italian, and I never did see such a set of villanous-looking fellows in my life. I mentioned this to my husband, and he said yes, they were a queer-looking lot, but he thought that when they had all got sober and cleaned up a bit they would be all right. I don't know how it was, but I did feel frightened of those men, and so did poor Mrs. Luck; and I verily believe if it hadn't been for my husband laughing at her she would not have gone in the ship."

"Poor creature. It's a pity she didn't allow her fears to be her best guide, and so have left the ship," Mrs. Shadwell remarked, sorrowfully.

"It is. But you see, ma'am, she thought she was doing everything for the best. She was very much attached to her husband, and though he had not treated her well she was most anxious to join him. She believed that Mr. Behrens had been his ruin in Calcutta, and she had strong hopes that now that he was away from Behrens' influence she would be able to work a change in him."

"What were your reasons for supposing that there were any intentions of foul play?"

"I had no reason to think that there were intentions of foul play at the time, sir. If I had, do you suppose I should have allowed my husband or Mrs. Luck and her child to have sailed in the vessel?"

"But you say you were much struck by the villanous appearance of the crew?"

"Oh yes, I was. But the idea I had was this. Mr. Behrens had shipped the crew, and I thought he had picked upon an idle set of loafers, such as are always hanging about shipping offices, and he had taken these men because he could get them for much lower wages than good and regular seamen. I did not know much

about seafaring matters, but it struck me in that light, and I remember very well what my husband's reply was when I mentioned it. He said, 'Yes, I have no doubt Behrens has put a lot of scum on board, but then he wants to make as much profit as possible out of the voyage. Besides, it's difficult to get good hands for such a short voyage.'"

"How did you know that the *Mayblossom* had been lost?" Mrs. Shadwell asked.

"I did not know it until some time afterwards. Captain Skeats promised to send a letter on shore for me either at Madras or Point de Galle, and he was to telegraph immediately he arrived at Bombay; but I never heard tale nor tidings of him again, and the ship was never reported after she had passed Saugor Lighthouse, at the mouth of the Hooghly. I waited in Calcutta eight months in the hope that something would come to light. Every inquiry was made, but nothing whatever was discovered about the missing ship, and it was concluded that being in ballast and very light she had capsized during a typhoon that was known to have raged over the Bay of Bengal about that time. When my last hope had died, and I felt it was useless to remain longer in Calcutta, I went home to my people in America."

When Mrs. Skeats had finished her painful narrative, Mrs. Shadwell left the room, returning in a few minutes with Petrel.

"Do you know this child?"

For a moment Mrs. Skeats scrutinised him, and then with a cry she sprang forward and caught him in her arms, exclaiming,

"Oh, indeed—indeed I do. It's poor Mrs. Luck's baby—Isaac!"

The little fellow cried and was frightened, and, stretching forth his hands to his foster-mother, said,

"Tate me, mamma, tate me."

Mrs. Skeats talked to him kindly, however, and hugged him affectionately to her bosom; and though it was not likely that his childish brain could remember her he soon grew pacified, and became much interested in the buttons on her dress.

When the excitement caused by this living revelation to the young widow, that one at least of her husband's passengers was in the flesh, had subsided, she naturally questioned in turn, and learned

the whole of the story of the rescue of the mother and child by the crew of the *Pearl*.

She listened to it in dumb amazement, and when all the details had been told, including the suspicious circumstances of the ship's name on her stern being painted out, and of the two dead men in the forecastle, she broke into hysterical weeping.

Mrs. Shadwell took Petrel back to his nurse, and then she used all a woman's arts and wiles to pacify her guest, and succeeded in doing so after a time. When she recovered she said,

"The suspicions I had at first are now more than ever confirmed, and I am convinced that there has been foul play."

"When you say that you had suspicions," John Robinson observed, "do you mean that you suspected evil intent on the part of somebody?"

"Yes."

"Who was the somebody?"

"Her husband for one."

"Her husband for one! Do you mean by that that there was more than one person interested in Mrs. Luck's death?"

"Yes."

"Who were the others?"

"Well, I am strongly inclined to think that Behrens himself had a hand in it."

"But why do you think that?"

"Because I know he disliked Mrs. Luck very much, or at any rate, he was very bitter against her."

"Was he such an unscrupulous and unprincipled man then, that in order to gratify a petty revenge, he would have resorted to a great crime?"

"Yes, I do indeed think so."

"But what about her husband? Do you consider that he had any hand in the tragedy?"

"Unquestionably I do. I believe it was a deeply-laid plot between Behrens and her husband."

"What was her husband?"

"He was connected with shipping, but I don't exactly know what his position was."

"Was he employed by some firm, or in business for himself?"

"I think he was employed."

"Do you know by whom?"

"No. I never knew much about him, and Mrs. Luck was always very reticent indeed about her husband's affairs. He used to come to Mr. Behrens' house often when I was in the service of Mrs. Behrens, but it was very seldom indeed that I saw him. I did not become intimate with Mrs. Luck until after she was separated from her husband, and she asked me, when I left my employment, to go and share her apartments with her. But during all the time I was with her she very seldom spoke of her husband. She seemed to be afraid of anybody knowing how she had been treated. She did tell me that she had been a sort of companion to a lady, the widow of an officer in the army, and through Luck she had deceived that lady, and been very ungrateful to her, and she also said that she and Luck were at school together. That was all I ever knew of her history. She was one of those quiet sort of women who don't like to talk much of their affairs."

This story of Mary Skeats supplied a very important and valuable link, but it still left the mystery far from being explained. It established one fact, however, and that was that Caleb Skeats was in all human probability dead. It was a singular thing that his putting his name on the back of the bank-note should have proved a clue, and been the means of bringing together his own wife and Mrs. Luck's child again. But his being dead left it doubtful whether the other half of the mystery would ever be unravelled. John Robinson could not help but think that there had been something wrong, but it did not seem to him probable that the ship had been wilfully wrecked. Yet it was singular that not one of the crew, apparently, should have survived to recount the adventures of the unfortunate *Mayblossom*. According to the report of Mr. Stobo, the mate of the *Pearl*, there were two corpses on board; and, from the fact of the boats being absent, one was led to conclude that the rest of the crew had gone away. Had they all perished, or was it possible that some of them still survived?

The whole affair suggested many things, and there were points involved which wanted considerable acumen to settle. The question was, what was to be done? If it was made a legal affair of,

it was obvious that it must be a long and costly process ; and then what end would Mrs. Shadwell and her adopted child gain ? Mrs. Luck was dead, and could not be brought back to life ; and if every member of the crew had perished, it would be the most difficult thing in the world to prove foul play, on anybody's part, though it might be possible that deeds of the most horrible description had been perpetrated. But the hulk of the *Mayblossom* was no doubt rotting at the bottom of the sea, and if there was no survivor from the wreck, there could be no evidence forthcoming to prove anything, save that one bright morning the ship sailed forth to the great ocean, and came back no more.

Of course, if the papers of Mrs. Luck had not been stolen, they would in all probability have supplied the missing link, but wanting them, everything was mere conjecture.

John Robinson discussed all these points with Mrs. Shadwell and Mary Skeats, but they felt it difficult to determine on a course of action, and so they concluded to lay the matter before old Mr. Fenwick, the solicitor, and take his advice.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A PEEP BEHIND THE MASK.

FOR a quarter of a century Isaac Greth had carried the knowledge that Luck was his son as a locked-up secret in his own breast. No man knew it save himself; no one suspected it. Naturally of a reticent disposition, even in those deeds that most men would have flourished in a blaze of public light, he could not bring himself to make the confession that he had now made. His own words, uttered in his own forcible and honest way, told in a pathetically eloquent manner how truly he had loved Marguerite Gnosspeilus, and how faithful he had been to her memory. Could anything have been more touching than his statement that for nearly twenty-five years he had gone yearly to lay a wreath upon that humble woman's grave? The world thought that Isaac Greth was a stern, hard, uncharitable man, but the world only saw the mask and not the real man behind. He had stated that he had first been attracted to Marguerite Gnosspeilus by seeing her give a shilling to a beggar-woman. In making that confession he had unwittingly revealed the true keynote to his own character.

"By probing her," he said, "I found out that her heart was infinitely too big for her slender purse."

Could he possibly have had an affinity for such a woman if his own heart had not been big also? Atoms must have something in common before they can unite, and a man must see, or think that he sees, in a woman signs which lead him to the conclusion that between him and her there is compatibility of mind.

Isaac Greth saw Marguerite Gnosspeilus's big heart, and his own big heart beat in response. The secret deeds of charity that he had done in the dark were written in golden light by the angel that records the good deeds of men, and the record was a long one.

She had stood out before his eyes as a figure that was all but touched with sublimity. Where other men look for beauty he looked for character; and he had peered beneath that plain, almost coarse face, and seen the genuine gold. And so he had gone forth and taken the woman to him and said,

“Between us there is a subtle something that has no name, but which makes us twain one.”

His meeting with Marguerite, his love for her, and their separation by her untimely death, were an eloquent wordless poem of human grandeur, touched with an infinite human sadness, and blurred with a human weakness. But who would not forgive its weakness when its grandeur was so great!

From the moment that Isaac Greth's son had come into the world the man had recognised his duty; and with the conscientiousness that had marked his every act in life he had devoted himself to the carrying out of that duty. He had tried to make a grand man, as he had tried to make a grand business, but he had failed—not from any want of honesty of purpose, but from the inherent weakness of the materials upon which he had to work. The business had succeeded, because the materials came from within himself, and he knew precisely their qualities; the man had failed from causes that Isaac had not calculated upon.

If Luck had had a mother's influence to guide and mould him in his earlier years, that moral warping would never have taken place; for is it not a truth that great men owe the beginning of their greatness to their mothers? But his father lacked the qualifications that are indispensable in one who would train a human plant so that it may flourish and grow into a noble tree. He had sent his boy to India firmly believing that in so doing he was sending him to a school in which he would graduate with high honours. It was Isaac Greth's mistake, and the penalty was his also. There is this to be said in Luck's favour, though possibly it goes for very little as it might be said of every man, that he would have made many and great sacrifices could he have undone the wrong he had done. But it was too late. He had written his fate in characters that no regret could erase and no tears wash away.

When that revelation of his parentage had burst upon him it

came as a shock, and though he rejoiced it was because he believed his position as heir to the great fortune was now secure beyond all doubt. It would be an insult to one's intelligence to state that he loved his father, or even respected him. Ingratitude had marked his career, and it was hardly to be expected that, after having felt contempt for Isaac Greth for so many years, he should suddenly come to love him.

Luck had but one wish and one desire now, and that was to obtain actual possession of the fortune and the business. He had gone too far to retreat, and with the desperate resolve of wicked men who find themselves entangled in a network of evil deeds, he would stop at nothing to gain what he had sinned for. If he could have done so, he would have avoided marrying his cousin, but on that act his position depended. And here it is worth while to pause for a moment to inquire why Isaac Greth was so anxious that his niece should become the wife of Isaac Luck. From her earliest childhood she had been very dear to him, and his love for her had strengthened and grown with her years.

"She is the apple of my eye," he had said ; and it was true.

He knew, as a man does know such things, that she would not attract men, as women with beauty attract them, and that fact in itself would have been sufficient to have brought forth love for her out of the tremendous sympathy of his nature, that burned within him like a fire. As a man he knew that a man might seek her, but it would not be for her beauty, but her money. Now, Isaac Greth wished to ensure that Marguerite his niece should not fall a victim to her fortune, and that she should, so far as it was possible to do so, feel that she was on an equality with her fellow-women ; that her physical deformity and lack of beauty should not isolate her in the world, nor be as a barrier between her and that state which nature intended a woman to occupy, and which she looks forward to with joy and pride. This was his earnest desire.

His motives were praiseworthy in an eminent degree, but in his attempt to give them practical shape he made a grave error. It seemed to him in his wisdom, that this niece whom he loved so well ought to be mated with his son, for whom, as he had said, he had consecrated himself to earning riches. He felt that if nothing

else could, gratitude at least would make the young man faithful to his father's wishes. Gratitude for that he, the offspring of parents whose origin was of the humblest, should find when he came to man's estate that by the devotion and honour of one parent at least, he had been placed far up in the social scale, and so surrounded with that which can command respect and influence—wealth.

“He shall learn that I have been a true father to him,” Isaac thought to himself. “He shall see that I, as the author of his being, have never once failed to be mindful of his future, and that to me he owes everything. Then shall he say, ‘For my father’s sake I will do my father’s bidding.’”

This end and aim might have been gained had not Isaac admitted a wrong factor into his calculations. That factor was *Gratitude*—the human quality, of all others, the least to be depended upon.

He who invented the fable of the viper and the woodman gave shape to a tremendous truth, when he pointed the moral of his fable against human ingratitude.

But come, we will cross the Mersey now to the spot that Isaac Greth had come to love even better than his birthplace—New Brighton. And here we find him very feeble, but as keen of intellect as ever, and still filled with his scheme of marrying his niece and giving up the reins of his business to his son.

In his green old age he found himself for the first time in his life surrounded with luxury. The upholsterers had had *carte blanche* to do as they liked; and knowing that the order came from the head of the firm of Greth Brothers they spared no labour and no expense in their desire to carry out Mr. Greth’s wishes.

Those few days during which the work was being done were busy days for Marguerite, for the old man insisted that she should superintend everything and consult her tastes. He insisted, because she wanted to sacrifice herself in attending to him, and he knew the pleasure she would derive in buying and planning and arranging for her future home. She would hardly have been true to her woman’s nature, if she had not taken pleasure in such a thing. While to see her eyes brighten and her cheeks flushed with joyous excitement, and to hear her talk proudly and enthusiastically of how she was going to arrange this, and what she was going to have

there, and how well that curtain contrasted with that carpet, and how sweetly pretty the cream-coloured and gold furniture in her boudoir was, gave him intense pleasure. It was like a tonic to him. He caught her spirit, and found himself taking as much interest in it all as she herself did.

It was, as the doctor told him, "a brain holiday to him," and he would benefit by it.

"Good Luck House," as Mr. Greth desired it to be called, was a quaint, old-fashioned place. Time had set the seal of antiquity upon it, and its gables, irregular outlines, its projecting windows and tiled roof, gave it that picturesqueness which your modern villa utterly lacks.

Its front was entirely covered with ivy, the growth of half a century at least, for the stems were thick and tough, and had grown into the wall in some places; and then the great door, dark, and polished with age, and made massive with iron studs and embedded iron bands, spoke of a time when a man's house was literally his castle. It was a dear old-time place, and it had been a witness to the marvellous transformation on the other side of the river. It had seen miles and miles of the foreshore reclaimed. It had seen the great docks gradually extend and lengthen out, and ever as they went there grew a mighty forest of masts. It had seen stretches of green fields one day and patches of pleasant woodland; it had seen the windmills perched on the sand dunes, waving their great arms in the piping breeze, and lo, the next day the windmills had gone, the woodland was cleared, and the green fields, green no longer, were aglow with brickkilns, and there had spread out as if by magic streets and squares and roads. It had seen generations of men come, and generations of men go, each succeeding generation leaving its deep impress on the ever-growing town. It had seen huge chimneys shoot up into the sky and belch forth volumes of smoke, telling how the busy workers in the human hive were labouring like Titans. It had seen the river ever flowing and flowing, sometimes calm and peaceful like a meadow stream, and anon lashed into frothy passion. It had seen the old-fashioned ferry-boats that were subject to tide and wind gradually give place to powerful steamers that defied wind and tide alike. It had seen babes born under its own roof, watched them grow into sturdy

manhood, drop into senility, and then pass away as moonlight shadows before the dawn of day. It had seen all these things, and it had heard the ringing laughter of joy and the sighs of sorrow. But through all the mutations it had stood immutable, and was then as firm and solid as it was ages ago when the builders had builded. The builders had long since gone to dust, but their work remained.

To this dear old place they brought Isaac Greth, and there came with him Jacob his brother, who was going to keep him company for a time, and his sister-in-law, and Marguerite his niece, and Isaac his son, and the family solicitor and doctor. Mrs. Turnbull, the faithful housekeeper, and two servants had got everything into apple-pie order, and in the great dining-room, with its polished oak wainscoting, blazed a cheerful fire that made ruddy the silver and glass and the spotless white tablecloth, for luncheon was already laid. When the little party had been all over the house, had peered into the cupboards, had peeped into every room, they assembled in that cheerful dining-room and sat down to luncheon, and once more did the old walls echo gay laughter and merry jest.

Marguerite sat next to her uncle; close to him so that he could touch her hand occasionally and lay his on her head, for he liked to fondle her as a loving father fondles his first child. Then when the cloth had been cleared and the dessert was on the table Isaac had some grand old Rhine wine passed round, and he told them all to drink Marguerite's health. And when that had been done he took from his solicitor a great parchment deed with a massive seal on it, and inscribed with a great deal of legal jargon, "Whereas we," and "know all men," and "by these presents," &c., &c., and he placed this into her hand, saying,

"There, child, that makes you absolute mistress of every brick and stone of this house, and of all the land around, and every tree upon that land, and everything below that land of whatsoever nature. It is your old uncle's wedding-present, and may God's rich blessing go with it."

Then Marguerite threw her arms around her uncle's neck and hid her face against him so that the company might not see her tears, and in a little while, when she looked up, her eyes were sparkling, her cheeks were very flushed, and she said prettily,

"Uncle, what am I to do with this great thing?" By the "great thing" meaning the ponderous parchment deed.

"Well," laughed the old man, merrily, "I think, my dear, you must have it attached to a gold chain and wear it round your neck."

"Don't be silly, uncle."

"Then, I tell you what, we'll build a strong-room for you to keep it in, and buy a huge bulldog to keep watch and ward at the door. Eh, will that do?"

"Really, uncle—"

"Well, if you object to that you had better hand it back to my good old legal friend there, Mr. Shepherd; he'll safeguard it for you, no doubt."

And so the formidable deed was handed back to the solicitor amidst much laughter, and then Mr. Greth said in a playfully solemn manner,

"Gentlemen, you had better form yourselves into a deputation to wait upon the owner of this property, and ask whether we are privileged to smoke under her roof."

"Why, of course you can, you silly old uncle," Marguerite cried, and away she ran to get his great porcelain pipe which she had been careful to see brought herself, for she knew how he loved his pipe, and what a solace it was to him. And when she had filled it with tobacco and held a light for him, and the gentlemen had gathered round the fire to smoke their cigars and sip a glass of old port, she slipped away in order that she might go and cry with very joy.

That boudoir of hers of which we have spoken, with its cream-coloured and gold furniture, was a perfect little bijou place. It had a projecting window that commanded a bold view. Here she ensconced herself and gazed pensively seaward to where the sky line was broken with many masts.

It was so strange to be sitting there in her own house; to be gazing on to the sea, so well beloved by her dear old uncle, and to feel as she did that two events were close at hand which must for ever place their indelible stamp on her life—the one her marriage, the other the death of her uncle.

The doctor had told her privately that Mr. Greth might hold out

for some months, for a year, or even two years. It was impossible to say, with even approximate accuracy, how long one so worn as he might live. But of one thing there could be no possible doubt, and that was that he held his life by a very insecure tenure, and, as the doctor said, the utmost care would be required, and in particular the avoidance of excitement.

It troubled her greatly as she thought that at any moment the blow might come upon her, and she knew that when it did come it would be a tremendous blow indeed. She shuddered as she thought of it, and she wished that she could put her marriage off so that she could devote all her time and attention to nursing her uncle. It would give her so much pleasure to attend to her father and uncle, who had decided to remain together at New Brighton for a time. She was perfectly well aware that that time could not be for long, and when they parted it would be for ever. That thought threw its shadow over her, and she could not bear the idea of marrying when her beloved uncle and her father both stood on the verge of the grave. In her father's case, however, the danger was not immediate. He suffered from some wasting, but painless, internal malady that was slowly and surely slaying him. But the happy family circle must be broken up soon, and the contemplation of that breaking up was terrible.

She turned these things over in her mind, and wondered if she could not persuade her uncle to let her postpone her marriage for a time. And yet she knew that he had set his mind upon it. He wanted to see her a wife before he died, he had told her.

A knock came to the door, and was repeated two or three times before she heard it, so absorbed was she; and when at last she called out, "Come in," and Isaac Luck presented himself, she was surprised and even a little startled.

"I have been looking for you," he said. "Mrs. Turnbull told me you were here, and I thought I would come up to you."

"I am so glad you have," she answered. "Come here and sit beside me, Isaac. I feel sad this evening, and have been thinking whether we could not postpone our marriage."

"Postpone the marriage!" he said, with a look of alarm on his face.

"Yes, dear; why do you look so surprised?"

"Why do you wish to postpone it?" he asked, anxiously.

"Because I cannot bear the thought of getting married when your dear father is so ill."

"But you know it is my father's dearest wish that we should be married as soon as possible."

"Yes, but that is because he thinks that we should be disappointed, but I would infinitely rather wait. I cannot bear the idea of eating funeral meats at our wedding breakfast."

"What nonsense!" Isaac exclaimed, petulantly. "If it is my father's wish why should we hesitate?"

"Isaac," she said, reproachfully, "your father is self-sacrificing, and thinks of us more than of himself, but that is no reason why we should be selfish."

"I fail to see where the selfishness comes in," he said, with a bitter laugh that astonished her. "It seems to me that there is not the slightest necessity for delay. Besides, you forget that I cannot touch a penny of my fortune until we are married."

She recoiled from him. His words stung her. A bandage seemed, as it were, to fall from her eyes, and for the first time she felt it was the fortune and not her he wanted.

When her uncle had asked her if her woman's instinct told her that Isaac loved her she had answered, "Yes." Now then her woman's instinct told her it was the money he loved above all other things.

Figuratively speaking, she staggered as she realised this. The visions of love and happiness she had conjured up suddenly vanished away.

"Cousin Isaac," she said, in surprise and reproach, "can it be possible that the money consideration is the only one that weighs with you in this marriage question?"

"No, certainly not," he answered, feeling some alarm as he saw the effect his thoughtless words had produced. "I came here to talk of love, and now you are angry with me."

"Isaac, I am not angry, but your words have pained me. The very thing uncle cautioned me against seems actually to be the case."

"What is that?" he asked, sharply.

"That all you wish is to get the money."

"It is false," he said, fairly trembling with suppressed excitement, lest anything should after all break this engagement off.

The consequences of that would be terrible to him. It was only three days before that the Indian mail had brought him a letter from Behrens, asking for the redemption of his bond, or at any rate the "payment on account of money actually out of pocket." He knew perfectly well that Behrens was not a man to stand on nice points, and might make awkward revelations if he thought he was being shuffled off in any way.

"You know, darling," Isaac continued, moderating his tone and taking her hand, "that my father is very eccentric."

"He is very just," she put in, sternly, not liking the word "eccentric" to be applied to her uncle.

"Of course, he is, dear; I know that. But he is eccentric also; and he has decreed that I am to remain stuck there in the office as a common clerk until we are married. It's not a very pleasant position for me, knowing that I am his son, and that he has made me heir to his property and part of the business, to be treated just as any other employé."

"It is your duty, Isaac, to please your father in every respect."

"I know it is, and I am quite willing to do that. But though it is a family secret at present that I am his son, it cannot remain so long, and then people will say I am a fool not to assert my position."

"O Isaac," she sighed, "I am shocked to hear you speak in such a way. How is the secret to leak out unless you yourself tell it? But even if it does, what need you care what people say? Let them talk. You can well afford to be independent of any idle gossip or silly scandal, and under any circumstances you cannot have to wait long, for even if by any chance we should not be married before dear uncle's death, I promise you I would not keep you waiting more than six months."

"Six months," he echoed.

"Yes. In common decency we could not have the wedding before that time."

"But he himself would not wish that."

"Perhaps not. In fact, I know he does not. But I am sure I could not bring myself to consent to be married before he was cold

in his grave. The mere thought of his death fills me with unhappiness. The actual fact will, I am sure, nearly kill me. But, alas, when you look into his bloodless face, and notice how terribly his strength has failed since his attack, you must feel that the end cannot be far off."

"I am very sorry I spoke," Isaac remarked, as he recognised that he had allowed his restlessness and impatience to lead him into a grave error. But he was disturbed with all sorts of fears. Out of the dead past came the memory of his unfortunate wife and child whom he believed to be both lying at the bottom of the sea, but nevertheless they haunted him with nameless dread, and he felt that until he had actually come into possession of the property for which he had risked so much, he would know no peace. But now it was necessary to make a show of love, even though he did not possess it. He kissed her, and said,

"Forgive me, my dear, if I have hurt your feelings. I did not intend to do so. I have been thoughtless and foolish, perhaps, but you must forgive me. You know that I am looking forward to my marriage with great eagerness, not only because I don't like to be in a subordinate position now, but because I am naturally anxious to possess you and call you my own."

She allowed him to caress her, and even returned his caresses, but he would have been a dullard indeed if he had not seen that she was deeply hurt notwithstanding his attempt at palliation.

"Come, dear, let us go downstairs again," he said.

"You go, Isaac, I will follow you directly," she answered.

So he kissed her once more and left her sitting there. Then she was unable to control her feelings any longer. She wept bitterly. She knew now that her dream of love had been a dream only. It was the money that was the attraction. Her uncle believed that his son loved her. She would still let him believe that; she would even do more, she would foster the belief. She would perjure her soul, she would break her heart, she would do anything rather than let the knowledge she had gained that afternoon come to the ears of her beloved uncle, for she was sure it would crush him down into his grave before his time.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BITTER CRY OF A BROKEN HEART.

THOSE pleasant, peaceful days at New Brighton had a very marked effect upon Isaac Greth's health. He got stronger, and his face lost some of its pallor and haggardness. He took kindly to the old-fashioned house, and though he had all his life deprecated luxury and ease, he seemed to enjoy them very much now. He loved to wander on the sands, leaning on Marguerite's arm, and to watch the vessels pass to and fro. His love for ships amounted to a passion, and he seemed never to tire of gazing upon them. When he was not out with his niece he would sit in the great bay window of the drawing-room, where he seemed to derive great satisfaction from the contemplation of the animated scene on the river. He was very grateful for this improved state of his health, because he was enabled to give some attention to his business. He did not go to the office, as Marguerite set her face so resolutely against that, that he yielded to her wishes. But once every day the head-clerk came to New Brighton, and he and Isaac spent a couple of hours in discussing business matters. Mr. Greth was very anxious indeed to get his affairs in order, knowing as he did that his days would be few now. He reviewed the results of his years of labour, and he felt satisfied. The consummation of that labour was at hand in the marriage of his son and niece. When that had taken place he felt that he would be able to rest, and wait calmly for the summons that should call him to quit earthly scenes.

The day appointed for the marriage was fast approaching, and Mr. Greth looked forward to it with an eagerness that was intense. He was impressed with the idea, no doubt, that at any moment he was liable to a recurrence of his illness, and that there was strong

probability that another attack might prove fatal. Consequently he was extremely anxious that the wedding should take place soon.

Marguerite on her part shuddered to herself as she contemplated her union with her cousin. A little cloud had come up and cast its shadow on her. His words that evening in her own pretty little room had given her a peep into his heart, and she was positive now that he possessed no real love for her. She had borne him the true love of a true woman, but she had discovered that he offered her ashes in return. Keenly sensitive and instinctively quick she had come to fully understand the motives that prompted him to accept her as his affianced wife.

"O fool, that I've been," she moaned, "to think that I, fool, who have no beauty and am a cripple, could win the love of a man like that!"

This was the bitter cry of a broken heart.

It was an awful awakening for her, and she felt it even more severely, because she knew how greatly her uncle was deceived. Luck himself saw that he had made a mistake, and he tried to rectify it, but it was impossible for him to remove the impression Marguerite had received. She had a horror of untruth, such a dread of deception, such a shrinking from anything that was not genuine or what it professed to be, and so the discovery she had made wounded her more severely than otherwise it would have done.

Her approaching marriage, instead of being a theme to inspire her with joy and delight, was a shadow that environed her and filled her with alarm.

It will be understood how she made desperate efforts to conceal the true state of her feelings from her uncle. But these efforts cost her no end of pain, because she felt and knew that she was supporting a deception.

At last she took her mother into her confidence, and told her exactly what she felt and feared with reference to her forthcoming marriage.

Mrs. Greth was perhaps inclined to be a little worldly and a little mercenary. At any rate she took a very different view of the matter to that taken by her daughter.

Mrs. Greth said, "You expect too much, Marguerite. It is hardly likely that your cousin will go down on his knees to wor-

ship you. He is by no means a demonstrative young man, but my impression is he feels a good deal more than you give him credit for."

"But, mamma, I am sure that Isaac's sole wish is to get his father's money," Marguerite pleaded, feeling very disappointed that her mother did not give her sympathy, as she expected she would have done.

"Stuff and nonsense, child," Mrs. Greth returned. "The fact is you have conceived a prejudice against your cousin, and you are allowing that prejudice to entirely blind you to the advantages of this marriage. Besides, even if your cousin has spoken of the money there is nothing very extraordinary in that. A young man who is heir to half-a-million, and has to fulfil a subordinate position in the meantime, is not likely to feel very contented."

Marguerite was silenced, but not convinced. She had asked for bread and received a stone. If she had wanted any confirmation of her own inferences she would have found it in Isaac Luck's conduct. With a blindness and stupidity that were simply amazing, he was no longer at pains even to make a show of loving his cousin. As the son of Mr. Greth he felt that his position was quite secure, even if he did not marry Marguerite. And the fact was he did not want to marry her. He wished to be left free.

He was particularly careful, however, not to betray, by look or sign, to his father what his true feelings were. At least he believed that he did not. But he failed to understand how wonderfully keen of observation his father was. And something in Luck's manner and Marguerite's face induced the old man one evening to say to her as she filled his pipe,

"Marguerite, it seems to me that that rascal of a son of mine is not so attentive to you as I think he ought to be."

"Nay, uncle, I believe—"

"Tut, girl, don't try to screen him," the old man exclaimed, interrupting her. "If he does not please you, do not hesitate to tell me. For though he be son of mine he must not trifle with your heart."

Marguerite trembled with fear at the thought that her uncle had discovered her secret. She revolted at the very idea of deceiving him; and yet she was sure that if she told him exactly what she

thought with reference to Luck, that it would be a death-blow to the old man, and so she forced a laugh, and twining her arm round his neck and laying her cheek to his, she answered,

"You dear, silly old uncle, you must not get such queer ideas into your head."

"No, my dear, I must not," he answered, with some significance. "But, Marguerite, is it silly for me to think that Isaac is not so ardent in his love as I would wish him to be?"

"Well, you know, uncle, it's not his nature to be demonstrative," she answered, making the best excuse she could.

"No, no, it is not; but I hope that it is at least in his nature to be honest and truthful. My thoughts are all for your happiness, Marguerite, and I have dreamed, perhaps very foolishly, that my money could purchase the happiness I wish for you. But may be I have committed a grave error, and have taken the wrong course."

"Ah, uncle, I wish you would not think so much of me," she said, with a show of emotion.

"And why not?" he asked, quickly, and, as it seemed to her, in an irritable manner. "Have you not filled my thoughts for years? Why, then, should I cease to think of you now when my life is almost done?"

"Do not be angry with me, uncle," she said, pleadingly; "I meant that you worry yourself, and make yourself too anxious about me."

"I have nothing else to worry myself about but you," he replied. "When a conscientious man has set his mind upon doing a certain thing he likes to accomplish it. I have set my mind upon you and my son becoming man and wife, but it is not to be accomplished at the expense of your happiness."

"Ah, uncle, pray do not make yourself miserable for nothing. I am sure I shall be very happy. How could I be otherwise when you have been at so much pains to make my happiness a certainty?"

"I have, I have," he said, sadly. Then he paused and added, "But men make mistakes sometimes," as though he was beginning to think seriously that *he* had made a mistake.

"They do, uncle," his niece remarked, as she caressed his face; "but you are too clever and too cautious to make mistakes."

He smiled sorrowfully on her as he said, with a sigh,

"I thought so at one time, but perhaps my vanity will be punished before I've done with this life."

A day or two after this conversation he was walking with her on the beach. It was a blustery morning, and the sea was tumbling on the sand in a long line of white, curling breakers. It was now within a week of her wedding-day, and though she tried to appear lively she was in reality depressed and sad, for the idea of leaving her uncle was not at all a pleasant one to her. He had seemed to enjoy the new kind of life so much. He had taken such a keen interest in the house, and derived so much pleasure from walking about the shore with her, that it seemed like cruelty to bring it all to an end. He had grown so much stronger, too, and was so much improved in health that she had a hope that a continuation of the treatment would benefit him still more, whereas if he went back into his old groove he might fall ill again.

On this particular morning he seemed to be livelier and stronger than usual. He enjoyed the bracing wind much, and appeared to derive a childish pleasure from letting the feathery foam fly into his face. An unusual number of ships were passing to and fro, and the whole scene was one of picturesque animation that had a fascination for the old man.

To have looked upon him one would have imagined that he was completely absorbed in contemplating the heaving waters, the creamy foam, and passing ships. But it was not the case, as was proved by his sullenly turning to his niece and saying,

“Marguerite, it wants a week to your marriage, does it not?”

“Yes, uncle.”

“Would it be a great disappointment now if I were to ask you to postpone the marriage for—for—say another month?”

“Oh, indeed no, it would not,” she cried quite joyfully, much to his surprise, and he looked at her queringly.

“Oh; it would not. Eh?”

She tried to remove the impression she had evidently made on him by remarking,

“I mean, uncle, that if you wish me to postpone it I shall do so cheerfully, because it will enable me to look after you for a little while longer.”

He appeared to become once more absorbed in the contemplation of the tumbling waters, and he stood and faced the wind that fluttered his silvery hair about his face, and brought a slight glow into his pallid cheeks

At length suddenly and emphatically he answered,

"I do wish it. You will postpone this marriage for a month. I am stronger and better now, and may last that time; but if I do not it does not much matter."

It was so unusual for him to speak in anything like a despairing or cynical tone that Marguerite was quite astonished, and she wondered what had brought about the change. Secretly she rejoiced, for she had come to take rather a gloomy view of her marriage with Isaac, and if she could have had her way she would have postponed it indefinitely.

"Shall I write to Isaac, uncle, and tell him that it is your wish that the marriage shall be postponed?" she asked.

"No," he answered; "he is coming here to-morrow, and I will tell him myself."

Marguerite made no further remark. She knew that her uncle must have some strange idea in his head, but she also knew that he had a strong objection to be questioned as to his motives, so she wisely refrained from speaking of the subject again then.

Luck came over the next afternoon. He generally came every day, but for the last day or two had been unusually busy. He and his father had some business matters to discuss, and when they had been disposed of the old man said,

"I am going to have this marriage of yours postponed, Isaac."

"Postponed!" Luck echoed in blank amazement, and turning very pale, as he thought it possible something of his Indian career had come to his father's ears.

"Yes," the old man went on, "I think it will be wise to do so, for both your sakes."

"And may I inquire, sir, why you think so?" Luck asked, as he recovered himself a little.

"Yes. It seems to me that you and your cousin want to know each other better."

Luck forced a laugh as he answered,

"I venture to think, father, that we are not likely to know each other any better than we do now, no matter how long we wait."

"Well, boy, that may be your opinion," Mr. Greth returned, with some sternness. "At any rate, if that is really so, the engagement had better be broken off altogether."

"Of course, if you wish it, I shall fall in with your view," was Luck's unfortunate answer, spoken with a certain amount of nonchalance.

"If I wish it!" exclaimed Mr. Greth, angrily. "If I wish it, sir. You know perfectly well that I do *not* wish it; that, on the contrary, it has been the hope of my life."

"Why, then, do you want to postpone the marriage?" asked Luck, feeling very uneasy.

"Because I am doubtful at present whether you are likely to make your cousin as happy as I desire you should do."

"But what has led you to that conclusion?"

"My own observations. I have watched you narrowly, and I cannot help thinking that you are only playing your part; and playing it badly, what is more. If you do not love your cousin it will be infinitely more honourable for you to say so at once. It would be a sore blow and a grave disappointment to me, but I should at least respect you the more for your honesty."

Luck was half tempted to acknowledge candidly that he did not love his cousin, but he feared the consequences. His father was eccentric, and might take it into his head, he thought, to cut him off with a very small sum. So he determined to put a bold face on the matter.

"I am unfortunate in not having been able to please you, sir," he said. "I certainly have done my best. I am quite at a loss, however, to understand what I have done to lead you to the conclusion that I do not love my cousin, and I may take leave to say that you are entirely mistaken."

"Are you speaking the truth, boy?"

"Yes, of course I am."

"I wish I could believe you," remarked his father, in a mournful tone.

"Well, really, father, I don't know why you should doubt me."

"I doubt you almost instinctively. It seems to me that there is a want of genuineness about you. Your actions and manner do not suggest frankness and openness, such as I would wish to see in my son."

Luck fairly trembled with suppressed excitement. What did this mean? Had his father discovered something, or was it merely

suspicion, based upon no sufficient ground? Luck was perfectly well aware that he had been neglectful of his cousin, and in his wooing there had been no warmth or sincerity. But he did not think that his father had noticed this. Of course he blamed himself now for not having been more careful. He knew perfectly well that he was playing a part, and that he had never loved, and never would love, Marguerite ; but, considering the large amount at stake, there was no reason why he should not play his part to perfection.

"I am sorry, very sorry, father," he said, with a great show of sincerity, "that I have failed to please you. My earnest desire has been to give you every satisfaction."

"Since when has it been your earnest desire to do that?" Mr. Greth asked, quickly.

"All my life," was the answer.

"That is false," his father exclaimed, angrily. "Your conduct in India disproves your statement."

Luck started and quailed. It seemed, then, that his father did know something, if not all. He felt that his fate was trembling in the balance. But he ventured on a bold remark.

"My conduct in India, perhaps, was not worse than that of thousands of youths placed in the same position, surrounded with temptation and without a guardian. Besides, at that time I did not know that you were my father—did not even suspect it. I believed myself to be utterly without a relation in the world who cared about me, and that thought naturally made me careless and cynical."

His father seemed touched, and he said, with tremulous voice,

"Well, well, perhaps I have been a little hasty. But I am a plain-dealing, straightforward man, and anything like deception horrifies me. I wish your future to be a bright and happy one, and I believe I have done what I could to ensure this. The happiness of your cousin is in your hands, and under no circumstances must you bring a shadow into her life. Do you understand what I mean when I say that?"

"Quite well, sir."

"Then I hope you will profit by what has passed between us to-day, and bear in mind that Marguerite loves you, and it will not be good for you to trifle with her long."

"I am fully aware of that, nor will I trifle with her. You judge me harshly in ever deeming me capable of so much baseness as to pretend to a love I do not possess. Marguerite's disposition is so sweet that any man might well be proud to win her, and I am quite sensible to your kindness and thoughtfulness in giving her to me for my wife. I shall seek to prove by every means in my power that your confidence has not been misplaced."

Mr. Greth was pleased with his son's answer. He thought that it had the genuine ring of honesty in it, and he was gratified. It was well for his own peace that he did not see the baseness that underlaid the fair speech. But though Mr. Greth was satisfied to a certain extent he resolved that the marriage should be postponed for another month. It is very possible that in coming to this determination he was influenced in some small measure by a lingering desire to keep Marguerite with him yet a little while longer, though his main object was undoubtedly that he wished to thoroughly convince himself that his son was not acting a part.

Marguerite heard the decision as to the postponement of the marriage with ill-concealed delight that did not escape the notice of her uncle, who, however, made no remark, whatever his thoughts might have been. Try as she would she could not conceal from herself that she had a secret dread of her cousin, and the woman who fears the man who woos her cannot properly love him. Whenever she looked into Luck's face she was conscious of an internal shrinking, so to speak, for she could not help the feeling that there was something sinister about him. She had made an attempt to discover gentleness in his disposition, but failed. He was harsh, irritable, and—as she was now convinced—false.

Under the circumstances it will be readily conceived how Marguerite experienced a sense of being respited for a time from what she had come to regard as a dark doom. Her own nature was so loving and affectionate that it was indispensable to its well-being that it should have something to cling to with a loving regard. But like all such natures it was tenderly sensitive, and looked for reciprocity. In her cousin, Marguerite knew there was no reciprocity. He had himself revealed that fact to her, so that she could not be mistaken. But what could she do? She was power-

less, for she would have suffered death rather than blight the hopes of her uncle. It was a mistaken feeling, albeit it was an unselfish one. Her thoughts were not for herself, but for the dear old man who had all her life been so tenderly regardful of her; who, in spite of her deformity and her want of beauty, had paid her as much regard and had been as devoted to her as if she had been the most beautiful and richly-endowed woman that the sun had ever looked upon. She was conscious of all this, and so preferred to sacrifice herself rather than disenchant and disillusionise him.

If the postponement of the marriage was a source of gratification to Marguerite, it was exactly the opposite to Luck. He could not help thinking, try as he would, that his position was exceedingly insecure, and would necessarily be so until he had come into actual possession of his fortune. This feeling of insecurity was that which is experienced by all men whose careers have been such that they are in constant dread of some phantom coming out of the dead past to condemn them. The adage that "murder will out" was for ever unpleasantly ringing in his ears, and he could not deafen himself to it, try as he would. He had not the remotest idea how or when his evil deeds might become revealed, but he was painfully aware of the fact that they *might*, and it was that possibility that frightened him.

"If my uncle were dead," he thought, "and Marguerite were my wife, all danger would be past, and I should breathe freely."

It was a delusive dream perhaps, but such men ever dream such dreams.

The postponement of the marriage acted as a shock to Luck's nerves, and it served to prove to him that he had been careless, so he resolved upon doing all that it was possible to do to create an impression that he was devoutly sincere in his professions of love for his cousin.

Thus a fortnight passed, during which his conduct was such that Marguerite began to think that she had been doing him a wrong. That sense of shrinking from him that she had hitherto experienced gave place to a yearning for his presence. She watched for his coming, and felt happier when he had come. But this state of matters was not to last. It was but the deceptive calm before the storm.

It happened one afternoon that Marguerite and her uncle had been out for a drive, for the old man had been advised by the doctor to take carriage exercise. He had rebelled against this advice at first. He said that his legs had served to carry him for threescore years and ten, and they must continue to do so to the end.

"I intend to walk into my grave," he had remarked, jocosely, "not drive into it."

But Marguerite raised her gentle voice, telling him that he must do as the doctor bade him ; and so the old man, being powerless in her hands, yielded, and a carriage was hired, and every afternoon Mr. Greth and his niece took a drive. Coming back from their drive one evening, as the dusk was rendering all things indistinct, they met Jacob Greth standing at the garden gate. He was excited and flurried, and he said to his brother, before Isaac had time even to descend from the carriage,

"Isaac, I want to see you privately ; I've something dreadful to tell you. Marguerite, you go into your mother."

Marguerite heard these words with a sickening sense of deadly fear at her heart, and instantly all her old misgivings sprang into existence again. There was something in her father's manner that seemed to justify her alarm. She would have stayed with her uncle, but almost roughly, for he was very excited, her father pushed her on one side, and said,

"Do as I tell you, child ; do as I tell you ; go into your mother."

And so, without another word, but feeling as if the earth was spinning around her head, she walked away.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SOMETHING VERY LIKE A MIRACLE.

MRS. VAVASOUR'S unfortunate marriage was a source of great grief to her, though she never uttered a word against her husband even to her most intimate friends. She realised with deep pain that he had lured her into the marriage in the hope of profiting by her money, and now that it was too late she began to discover that his past career had been disreputable. She found out that his father had set him up in practice, but his fatal passion for gambling had caused him to neglect his profession, and had led him into monetary difficulties, and that had been the true cause of his going to sea. In marrying Mrs. Vavasour he hoped, no doubt, that he would get sufficient of her fortune to enable him to clear of all his liabilities and start on a fresh career. But in this he was disappointed, and it resulted, as the reader is already aware, in his making another voyage.

For a long time Mrs. Shadwell heard nothing of her husband, and, as already stated, she had been led to address inquiries to the owners of the ship in which he had sailed, and through them learnt that he had been ill. Then, as his silence was still prolonged, she began to fear that he must either be dead, or had made up his mind not to communicate with her any more.

It is useless to say that this caused her no misgivings or unhappiness. If she experienced no real love for her husband, he himself was entirely responsible for that; but this notwithstanding, she was exceedingly anxious, for she felt deep sympathy and sorrow for him. She was too honest and too sterling a woman to close her eyes to the responsibilities and duties that her position as a wife imposed. Although she had been deceived in Dr. Shadwell, she blamed herself, because she considered that she had allowed

herself to be too easily drawn into the marriage, and that in spite of the strong prejudice she felt for the doctor.

Between her and the friend of her early youth, John Robinson, there was much confidence, but it was the confidence an honest woman was justified in reposing in an honest man. She felt that she wanted an adviser, and she knew no one else to whom she could appeal, for she shrank from giving her father pain, and she knew perfectly well it would pain him if he learned what the true character of her husband was. But even with John she was very reticent, so far as her husband was concerned. She had told him that since his departure Dr. Shadwell had not written to her. At that point, however, she stopped. She went no further than giving him that bit of information; and though, no doubt, he drew very correct inferences therefrom, he was not only careful to conceal his thoughts, but he studiously avoided making any remark. He was a plain, homely young man, and not much given to demonstration; but he was sensitive nevertheless, and he could feel keenly, although he had the faculty of being able to conceal his feelings. It is almost needless to say that in helping Mrs. Shadwell to unravel the mystery that surrounded Stormy Petrel, the child of the wreck, John found an occupation that was very congenial to his tastes—congenial because he imagined, rightly or wrongly, that he was rendering her a service; and further, because it was too evident now that there had been foul play, and he was anxious to get at the bottom of it. The foul play had been made perfectly evident by the startling story, as told by Mrs. Skeats. The next step was to discover who was the author of the evil, and what motives had actuated him. That was by no means an easy task, however; at any rate not for a private individual to undertake, and Mrs. Shadwell rather shrank from seeking professional aid, and for this reason. The old suspicion that her husband had abstracted the papers from the bag, on board the *Pearl*, had recently revived, and the dread lest that suspicion might turn out to be only too well founded, acted as a check upon her movements. For she contemplated with horror the bare chance that her husband might be proved guilty of this mean and detestable act.

To accurately define a cause for the reviving of this suspicion in the lady's mind is by no means easy. He himself had given an

emphatic denial to it when she had mentioned it to him, and she had quite believed that denial. Why, then, had her belief been shaken? Well, it seems most probable that it was owing to his conduct in leaving her, and to his not having written during his long absence. Why had he treated her thus? A husband who really loved his wife would hardly have allowed so long a time to have elapsed without writing to her, when so many opportunities for communicating must have occurred. It very naturally led her to think that he bore her no affection or respect, to say nothing of love; and therefore, a man who could so deceive her in the one thing would hardly hesitate to practise deceit in another, for the sake of serving his own purpose.

It was a humiliating reflection, but it was forced upon her by all the circumstances as she viewed them now, and she was compelled to admit to herself that she had been very blind to her own interests, and also very foolish, when she consented to become Dr. Shadwell's wife. He had deceived her, both as to himself and to his position. That was a self-evident fact. Mrs. Shadwell, however, took a very sensible view of her case. She blamed herself for allowing herself to be deceived, quite as much as she blamed her husband for deceiving her. But the mischief was done, and she wisely recognised the utter futility of openly proclaiming her wrongs. So she held her peace, kept her own counsel, and assumed a cheerfulness, even if she did not feel it.

Fortunately for her, she found in Petrel an object on which to bestow her affection and care, and he kept her so fully occupied that she had no time for brooding, even if she had been so disposed. But temperamentally she was not of a brooding nature. She was one of those women who accept the inevitable with resignation. They may sigh a little and even chafe; but they do not go through the world loudly moaning out complaint, as though the world had nothing else to do but to attend to their wrongs.

Stormy Petrel had developed into a remarkably fine child. He was quick, bright, and intelligent, and gave all his child-love in return for his foster-mother's love and care. Her one great anxiety was to unravel the mystery that surrounded him; but as the days became weeks, and the weeks months, and she found herself no nearer the desired end, she began to despair of ever succeeding. In

Mrs. Skeats she found not only a sympathiser but a compassionate woman, who proved herself so useful that Mrs. Shadwell expressed her willingness to retain her services, an arrangement that Mrs. Skeats was only too willing to accede to. Between them was a bond of strong sympathy, having its origin in a cause that affected them both, and they were both equally interested in attempting to unravel the mystery that had brought them together. Mrs. Skeats no longer entertained the shadow of a doubt that her husband had fallen a victim to treachery of a most wicked and diabolical kind; and naturally, under the circumstances, her suspicions fell upon Mr. Samuel Behrens. But suspicions were not proofs, and without something tangible to be got hold of it was impossible to take any steps. John Robinson counselled somebody being sent out to Calcutta with a view of making inquiries into the loss of the *Sea Foam*, and he consulted with his solicitor on the subject. But that gentleman scouted the idea as impracticable under the circumstances, for it would not only be attended with great expense, but difficulties of virtually an impracticable nature. For a long and elaborate inquiry would have to be instituted with a view of getting such evidence as would justify an appeal to a magistrate. Moreover, the difficulty was increased by the fact that Captain Skeats' ship sailed under the American flag, and was therefore out of the jurisdiction of a British court, unless it could be proved that she had been wilfully cast away with British subjects on board.

The result of this was that Mrs. Shadwell began to despair of ever getting at the truth, unless through something very like a miracle. This "something very like a miracle" was to occur far sooner, however, than she could possibly have dreamed of, even if she had been given to dreaming wild dreams.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“IN THE SAD HOUR WHEN THE SHADOWS FALL.”

IT chanced that when Mrs. Shadwell and Mrs. Skeats had quite abandoned hope of discovering anything certain about the parentage of Mrs. Shadwell's foster-child, there came a note for her from the owners of the ship in which her husband had sailed. The note only contained a few lines to the effect that they would be glad if she would call at their office, as they had some important information to convey to her with respect to her husband. Those few lines, however, seemed to her to be pregnant with great events. The “important information” somehow sounded like a knell, and therefore she went to the office of the owners, fully prepared to learn that fate had once more made her a widow.

She was shown into the private room of one of the partners—an old, very grey, and kindly gentleman, and directly Mrs. Shadwell looked into his face she felt sure that her fears were well founded. He gazed at her with pity and sorrow, and something in his whole bearing seemed to say, “I have bad news for you.” With great tenderness and feeling, and also with considerable skill and tact, he informed her that her husband had died in the general hospital at Calcutta, after long suffering from dysentery.

Mrs. Shadwell heard this news with deep and genuine sorrow. It seemed to her difficult to realise that the light-hearted, pleasant, handsome Dr. Shadwell was lying dead. He, whose acquaintance she had made, as it seemed, but yesterday, and yet since that “yesterday” how much had happened! She had bound herself to him for life; but now the bond was severed. She was free again, and he who was her husband had died amongst strangers in a far-off land. Pity, if not love, moved her to deep emotion, and she wept.

In a few minutes she brought her feelings under control, for she had a horror of noisy and demonstrative sorrow. When the member of the firm saw that she had grown calmer he gave her all the details of her husband's illness and death as they had been brought home by the captain of one of the firm's ships, and he concluded by handing her a large square paper packet, tied round with red ribbon and securely sealed.

"These are, I believe, some letters and papers that belonged to your late husband. A little while before his death he gave written instructions that if he died they should be sent to you. In compliance with that request the hospital authorities delivered them to one of our captains to bring home. In giving them to you my duty ends; but, as a matter of business, I must ask you to sign a receipt, so as to relieve us from all further responsibility. I may mention," he added, "that at the time of his death your husband had no salary due to him, as he had anticipated payment by drawing in advance. We make a rule, however, of paying the widows of men who may die abroad in our service six months' salary, and we shall have much pleasure in forwarding you a cheque for that amount."

Mrs. Shadwell declined this proffered generosity, explaining that her position was such that she was well provided for. Then having signed the necessary receipt for her husband's papers, she returned to her home, feeling, now that the worst was known, a certain sense of melancholy relief. She had suffered suspense for many months, and now certainty had come, though it was the certainty of death. If she had ever entertained a reproachful thought against her husband it was all forgotten in these early hours of her bereavement, and she wept as she pictured him dying lonely and sorrow-stricken in far-off India. For three or four days she was much cast down, and the seals of the packet she had received remained unbroken. It may be thought that she would have evinced some curiosity and natural anxiety to know the contents of this packet, but as a matter of fact she had certain misgivings that rather caused her to shrink from breaking those seals. If it had been to save her own life she could not possibly have given any substantial or logical reason for these misgivings. "They exist," she might have said, "but why they exist I cannot determine."

On the evening of the fourth day after she had learnt the news of her new widowhood, she resolved to open the packet, and in the solitude and silence of her own chamber, after all the household had retired for the night, she broke the seals. She found inside another packet of papers securely tied up in a bundle, also sealed, and bearing a label with this inscription :—

"In the event of my death this packet is to be delivered intact to my widow, Blanche Shadwell."

In addition to this there was a bulky letter in a large envelope, which was likewise tied up and sealed. It was addressed, "Mrs. Blanche Shadwell," and in one corner of the envelope was written in small but neat characters, "This letter is not to be opened under any circumstances except by the person to whom it is addressed. Should she be dead I solemnly charge anyone else into whose hands it may fall to utterly destroy it."

Mrs. Shadwell perused those words with palpitating heart, for somehow they appeared to her to have a terrible meaning. Between the lines she read, "Revelation, revelation." She turned the packet over and over in the light of the shaded lamp, and then holding it in her hand she leaned back in her chair closing her eyes and mentally reviewing the course of her short but not altogether uneventful life. And now, while still a young and handsome woman, she was once more a widow, and she held between her fingers the dying words of her husband who had played her false. What would those words reveal? She felt positively faint as possibilities loomed up before her. At length, her trembling white fingers released from its cover a manuscript consisting of several sheets of large letter paper, pinned together.

"I am dying," the document began, "and know it. Otherwise what I am now about to tell you would have remained unsaid. In fact, even now there is a feeling that prompts me to carry my secret with me into the darkness and silence of the grave, from whence no human being could ever drag it. But another feeling, and I am not sure that it is not a better one, urges me to put into writing for your perusal what is on my mind. It is said that when a man comes to stand on the verge of the grave all his views undergo a change; and however bold and careless he may have been he feels humbled and cowed as the shadow of the incomprehensible mystery

of death darkens over him. At one time I did not believe this—nay, up to a few hours ago, I may say I did not believe; and yet, in my professional capacity, I have witnessed many deathbeds, and seen the changes they produce. But now that I know that I am doomed I recognise that there is a power mightier than man's, one that breaks the haughtiness of a man's pride. And so, before my fast waning strength sinks so low as to render effort practically impossible, I resolve to write to you.

"When I first met you I believed that I loved you, and even now am of opinion that had you gone the right way to work you might have redeemed me from the curse that seems ever to have been over me. Understand that I do not reproach you. I expected too much and got little. But disappointment has dogged my steps from my youth. I have looked for fruit and found only ashes. But let that pass. I have, as you know, been a slave to the passion for speculation, or, as plain-speaking people would say—gambling. I could not help it. The passion was there. I tried to conquer it. I could not, and it conquered me. It exercised a fascination over me that lured me on and on to destruction. I knew perfectly well I was going to destruction, but I could not stop myself. I was a slave, and was forced to obey the tyranny that held me in thrall. It was this power that led me to determine to possess you, even when I learnt that you did not love me, for I believed that you had means that would enable you to release me from a heavy burden of debt, and give me an opportunity to take a new departure. For it is a peculiarity of the gambler's mind that he has firm faith in his star; and, no matter how great his losses may have been, he thinks that the next turn of the wheel will bring fortune to him. Alas! it is a fatal delusion, and it hurries men on to their destruction. But let me go back to that period in our acquaintance when the unfortunate woman and her child were rescued from the derelict in the Bay of Bengal by the crew of the *Pearl*. I do not know what it was that brought the thought into my mind that the bag which was taken from the woman's body when she was first brought on board contained money or valuables of some sort. But whatever it was, the thought grew upon me, and though, I declare solemnly, I tried to resist it, tried to shake it off, I could not. I was in difficulties. I owed considerable sums on board the ship,

and it occurred to me that if that bag did contain anything of value I might abstract it without any fear of detection, since no living soul on board knew its contents. I did not, however, yield to this feeling until the woman when she was dying told you that the contents of the bag would place you in possession of her history. I overheard that statement, for I was listening, and had you not been so excited when you rushed from the cabin to call me when you saw that the woman was at her last gasp, you would, no doubt, have been surprised at my being in the passage close to your cabin door. But so it was, and you were too much absorbed to take note of the incident. That night when you were on deck I abstracted the contents of the bag, and I was mortified to find that in actual money there was only the half of a hundred-pound note.

"In glancing hurriedly over the papers I saw that they might be of value in the future; but it seemed to me that marriage with you was of more importance to me, and I resolved to win you by some means or other. I did win you; and I still think that you might have secured my devotion and cured me of my gambling propensities—but, firstly, you were absorbed in the child; and, secondly, you did not love me as I should have liked to have been loved by a woman. Understand me, I do not blame you for this. It is only another of the many disappointments that have pursued me through life. You were an honest and faithful wife, and you strove to make me happy and comfortable. Many men would have been content with that, but I was not. My restless, exacting disposition wanted something more. My creditors were pressing me; ruin was staring me in the face. My fatal star still lured me. I believed that if I only had a little money to speculate I should retrieve my fallen fortunes. I appealed to you, only to discover that you had been but a delusive shadow to me, so to speak, and though I grasped I held nothing. The worser qualities of my nature came uppermost then, and even the slight admiration I had possessed for you gave place to something very like loathing. Then it was I resolved to endeavour to make use of the information the papers from the bag had given me, and turn that information to pecuniary advantage to myself. For I was desperate, and desperate men pause not to reflect what may result from the steps they take. I had in my keeping certain secrets; and I felt that if I used those secrets

well, and held them *in terrorem* over the head of the person implicated in the revelation made by the documentary evidence I had abstracted from the bag, I might be able to compel him to purchase my silence at a high price.

"By the time you have read thus far you will shudder, no doubt, as you remember that the man who confesses this to you was your husband. Yet perhaps you will allow that there is some redeeming feature about me when I tell you that I fully understand the execrable meanness of my conduct. But I suppose I have been quite lacking in moral regard for the rights and feelings of others; though now such reparation that I can make to you I do make, and I am convinced you will admit that the penalty for my offence has at least been heavy. It was with a view of carrying out my plan of—I am bound to use the term—blackmailing, that I decided on coming to Calcutta. The man over whose head I hoped to wield the secret I had gained lived in Calcutta. But there ever seems a Nemesis who controls all these sort of things. It was a Nemesis that caused the wretched woman of the wreck to commit to paper the particulars of this man's iniquity, and it was the same Nemesis that lured me to come here in pursuit of my purpose, in order that she might destroy me.

"Before reaching Calcutta I became ill, but I did not consider my illness serious, nor even likely to become serious. I was young, and youth ever thinks itself immortal; or, at any rate, it is always hopeful and sanguine. But the disease that had fastened upon me tightened and tightened its grip. It was not to be shaken off. It coiled its insidious folds about me and laid me low; yet even when I was borne to the hospital here I did not despair. I believed that my youth and my strength would triumph, and I thought this in spite of my professional experience, which told me that my illness was making too deep inroads to be eradicated. But as time passed on, and my strength waned, the truth dawned upon me that the end of my history was at hand.

"I will not weary you with attempting any description of my feelings. Suffice to say, they have been torture; my sufferings have been acute. To die like a dog amongst strangers is in itself a heavy punishment. But I neither whine nor play the hypocrite. I staked to win, and I have lost. I knew that there were risks,

and I accept defeat like a brave man, for my worst enemies shall not say I am a coward. And in my sufferings and this confession even you may be able to see some redeeming features; and though you pity me not nor sorrow for me, you may be able to think less harshly of me than you otherwise would have done. You are a good woman, a noble woman, and I am honest enough to say you deserved a better fate than to become linked to a man like myself. But such is life. The best of us do not always meet our reward, nor the worst of us our just deserts. The inscrutable workings of destiny elude the grasp of human comprehension. It is not my purpose, however, to moralise. The time has come for me to learn that my days are now but few. That stage in my disease has been reached when there is no longer any room for possible doubt as to the issue.

"Is it a weakness at such a moment for me to say that if one wish short of life could be granted to me now, that wish should be that you might stand by my side; that I might hold your hand in mine; that I might look into your eyes; that I might hear your lips murmur, *I forgive you*. But the enemy that has steadily and surely pursued me has decreed it otherwise; and so, far away in this burning land, far removed from my kindred, in the ward of a public hospital, with only strangers around, I die. And I have willed and wished that my remains shall lie in a nameless grave; for no stone is to be placed above me—only a wooden cross, with a number that shall indicate that a stranger from over the seas lies buried here.

"Thus, then, I have told you that of myself which you may have suspected, but which, lacking confirmation, you would have been loth to believe. But you know the truth now, and when you do know it I shall be dead, for I have made my death an indispensable condition to these papers reaching you. It is no use your reviling the dead. And though I have wronged you, neither your blame nor reproaches can affect me in my grave. I am sure, however, that your nature is too sweet to allow you to think bitterly even of me. It is even possible you may be able to accord me some pity, as you think of me as a misguided man, whose moral nature has been painfully warped. For this warping I blame no one. Even to attempt to suggest a possible reason for some men

being bad and others good would open up a stupendous field of metaphysical argument. The result, so far as I am concerned, is painfully apparent. I might have taken a straight road, and I took a crooked one. Coming from an honourable family, I descended to dishonourable courses. Why I have done this I leave it for others to determine. My hold on life is gone, and I pass to oblivion. The grave is a barrier beyond which the living cannot pass to injure the dead. The dead, at least, lie quiet, even though those whom they have injured in life may chafe and fret. Therein at least the dead have an advantage.

"And now, as regards the object of my writing to you,—I repeat that it is to make some reparation. The papers I abstracted from the bag, and which I now return to you, will give you the information you wanted. You will see that they reveal a dark plot of villany and crime, and they may place in your hands a weapon wherewith to strike those who have been the chief actors. I fall that someone may rise. And through you the child to whom you have been a mother may come to his rights, and the dead woman who lies at the bottom of the sea may be revenged. Such reparation now at the eleventh hour may be a poor thing, but at any rate it is something. I have deceived you ever since I made your acquaintance, but the time for deception is now past, and so I show you my blackness. Yours is a forgiving nature, and I should like to think that you will accord me some measure of pity. I think if I were convinced of that I should die easier. And yet why should I expect your pity? What have I done to deserve it? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Talents I had, but I have wasted them. Opportunities that might have led to golden results I have allowed to slip by; I have deceived all belonging to me, but none so cruelly as I have deceived myself. And now, as my last sands dribble out, my eyes are opened, and I know how foolish and mad I have been.

"Farewell! my hand trembles a little, and before my eyes rises a mist. Is this emotion? A sight of your face would make the way to the grave easy. But it cannot be. The wide seas roll between us. I am alone with the stinging bitterness of my thoughts; and over me stands the grim and ghastly figure of pitiless Death. Once more, farewell! When your indignation has somewhat passed

away, try not to think too harshly of me, for I was your husband."

As Mrs. Shadwell ceased reading she leaned back in her chair and wept. Perhaps her tears were only the result of the natural emotion that any woman must have felt on perusing such a document, when the relation in which the writer stood to her was considered.

Thus, then, the terrible truth was revealed to her, and she learned how great was the deception of which she had been the victim. But she felt no bitterness, no resentment. Hers was not the nature for such feelings. She was a gentle woman, with a loving, kindly disposition, and naturally disposed to think pityingly and charitably of those who injured her. Certainly, the man who had so deeply wronged her had her pity now.

As she reflected, it seemed to her all so strange that she should have been the central figure in this drama of real life, in which there had been not a few sensational scenes. And now once more widowed, with life still sitting lightly upon her, what would her future be? She could not help that thought. It forced itself upon her. But when the first shock which the revelation had given her had subsided, her thoughts turned to her foster-child, and she murmured, "He is my future;" meaning thereby that she would live for him. The mystery of his birth would be a mystery no longer, for she held in her hand now the solution of it. And she was deeply thankful that her misguided husband had been prompted in his last hours to send those documents to her. Had he destroyed them, it would have been an act of infamy that even she, had she been made aware of it, might have found it difficult to forgive. But the danger was past. Her husband was dead. The long-lost papers were hers. The secrets would be disclosed, and she might now be able to carry out the wishes of the child's dying mother. In these thoughts she found much comfort, and feeling tired and jaded then, she carefully locked up the precious papers in her bureau and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE RECORDS OF A GREAT CRIME.

ON the following day Mrs. Shadwell proceeded to examine the bundle of papers which her husband had returned with his own communication. The principal paper was a narrative in the form of a diary, but there were several letters from Isaac Luck to his wife. The following are extracts from the diary, which had been commenced in Calcutta soon after Mrs. Luck had left her husband :—

“I do not think that in this great city to-day a more unhappy woman than I am could possibly be found. It seems to me such a short time ago since I was the happy, contented Lena Cheston, living in the kindly sympathy and motherly care of Mrs. Gascoigne. And yet since then what a world of sorrow I have gone through. A wife, mother—and now a neglected, forsaken woman. What have I done to deserve it? Ah, what have I not done? Though I had never committed another sin in my life, my leaving Mrs. Gascoigne as I did would have wanted a lifelong atonement to purge that sin away. And yet when I think of it, that I did it for love’s sake, I cannot help believing that I have been too heavily punished. What unlucky fate was it that once more brought me and this man together after so long a separation? He deceived me as a boy, and therefore I might have known that as a man he would be no more true. I cannot help blaming myself, and yet I fain would think that the love I bore him might be allowed to palliate my fault.

“If it were not for my dear baby, I really think I should go mad or do something desperate. But though my husband has been a curse to me, my child is a blessing. He gives me something to live for; and to make his future bright and happy shall be my constant duty. There are moments, however, when I cannot help a gloomy

feeling in reference to this child. If anything should happen to me, what would be his fate? Motherless, and with a worthless father, his future would be black enough. At such moments as these I almost wish that he would die. It is perhaps a wrong thought, but I cannot help it.

"That odious Mrs. Behrens has been to see me to-day. How I do hate that woman! I am convinced she comes here in the character of a spy, and everything I say to her she carries back to her husband and to mine. Perhaps I am doing her a wrong. If I am I hope I may be forgiven. But there is such a want of genuineness about her. She seems to me to be the very embodiment of deceit.

"I feel very much happier and more contented to-day, for my friend, Mary Dotbelle, has come to live with me. She is, I am sure, as genuine as gold, and it is a comfort to have her with me. She fully confirms my opinion of Mrs. Behrens, and she says that Mr. Behrens and my husband are always together. I am convinced that Isaac would never have behaved to me as he has done had it not been for Behrens. That man, I am sure, is thoroughly bad. I almost shudder when I think of him, for I am certain he is capable of murdering anyone against whom he might feel spiteful. He has simply persecuted me with his loathsome attention, and I confess I should feel gratified to learn that he had been soundly horsewhipped.

"Mary Dotbelle is going to be married. I shall miss her society very much. She is so genuine and good, that she deserves all the happiness life can give her. Her future husband is a good man. I am convinced of that. In his every act and manner there is the ring of the genuine gold.

"I am helping Mary Dotbelle to prepare for her wedding. She is as happy as a lark and full of hope, looking forward to her marriage with eagerness and delight. Ah, when I remember how short a time it is since I myself was as she is now; so short a time, and yet what changes! It is folly, I know, to brood over the past or to weep over errors of judgment; but surely I should hardly be human if I did not feel keenly the error I have made. To my true friend, Mrs. Gascoigne, I turned a deaf ear, and listened to the delusive voice of a man who lured only to destroy. It does

seem hard that a woman who loves and trusts, and gives her heart into the keeping of a man, should become a victim to perfidy and deceit. We are told that all things are ordered for the best ; but if it is for the best that a woman's love should be repaid with cruelty and neglect, then I must confess myself a hardened sceptic. People would no doubt say that I was to blame for rushing blindly, and in spite of warning, to my fate. But love *does* blind, and she who falls a victim to the passion is surely deserving of some pity. I loved Isaac Luck so truly ; my faith in him was so strong, that had he only shown some desire to make me happy I would willingly have become his slave. As it is, his neglect has hardened me, and though he is my husband and the father of my child, I unhesitatingly pronounce him a coward and a villain. It is very hard for a woman to apply such terms to the being she has at one time all but worshipped ; but love that is deceived becomes bitter hatred, and I should only be false to myself if I attempted to disguise from myself the fact that I do hate Isaac now. How can I possibly do otherwise ? He found me a perfectly happy and contented girl, and with almost fiendish cruelty he hesitated not a moment to utterly destroy my happiness and contentment. Cheerfully would I have shared with him poverty, discomfort, trials, and pain—everything, had he only returned my love. But he does not love me. He has never loved me, but lured me by specious arguments, only to cast me off a broken and wretched woman as soon as he tired of me. I would, if I dared do so, go to Mrs. Gascoigne, and weep tears of blood at her feet, until she said she forgave me. But I cannot bring myself to do it. I was so false to her, that I am sure she could never restore me to the place I once occupied in her affections. No, no, I must bear the burden of my cross alone ; I must purge away my fault by silent suffering. And yet it is so hard, so hard, so hard !

“ Mary Dotbelle has changed her state, and has entered on the perilous road of married life. Whither will it lead her ? To happiness or misery ? I pray to God she may be happy. She deserves it. But we do not always get what we deserve. I feel, however, that she will be happy. Caleb Skeats is so good. He is so straightforward, so blunt and honest. Deception, I am sure, could find no place in such a man.

"Mary is delighted with her new state. She says that Caleb is one of the best men ever created, and I am sure he is. I look upon him as a personal friend, almost as a brother. He is so kind to me. I am sure my heart will break when he and his wife go away.

"Mrs. Behrens has been again to-day to say that my husband is in Bombay, and wishes me to join him. I am amazed and dumb-founded. Can it be that all this time I have been wronging him? Is he, after all, a better man than I have deemed him to be? Perhaps having got out of the influence of the Behrens's he is determined to reform, and is anxious to make some reparation to me for the wrong he has done. I hope it is so. I will do all that woman can do to make him happy. I will be a faithful, honest, dutiful wife. I will make him love me, even in spite of himself.

"It has been decided that I go to Bombay. Captain Skeats has got a charter for his vessel, the *Sea Foam*, to go to Bombay, and I shall be a passenger on board. This idea fills me with delight, because I shall for a little while longer have the pleasure of being with my dear friend, Mary Skeats, for she will accompany her husband.

"New hopes are springing up in my breast. I am going to my husband. The fact of his wishing me to join him is a good sign. It shows, at least, that he is not lost to every right feeling of duty to the woman whom he has made his wife and the mother of his child. He has erred and caused me bitter anguish, but if he repents I will freely forgive him. Never a word of reproach shall escape my lips. He shall have the warmest and most perfect devotion it is possible for a woman to give him. I pity him for his folly now. I will love and worship him for his repentance. I am still young and may live long, and it may be that my future life will be one of unclouded happiness. That will compensate me for what I have suffered.

"Poor Mary Skeats is ill, and there seems a likelihood that she will not be able to accompany her husband to Bombay. This will be a great loss to me, and I am deeply grieved; but I must resign myself. However much one desires it, it is unreasonable and stupid to suppose that one's life can be all sunshine and flowers. There must be some disappointments, some sorrow, some crosses;

and it is well, and there is much to be thankful for, if these things are tempered by some gleams of enjoyment and peace.

"It is now definitely settled that Mary will not accompany her husband. Her complaint renders it necessary that she remain here under medical care. Poor girl, she is much cut up. So is her husband. They are so fond of each other. I am sure a worthier couple never existed. They are drawing comfort from the fact that the voyage is only a short one, and they will soon meet again. Captain Skeats intends, when he comes back from Bombay, to return to his own country—America. Mary is looking forward with great delight to going home.

"I have parted from my dear friend, Mary Skeats, and commenced my voyage. Perhaps I shall never see her again. It is a hard thing to think of, but it must be borne with. I wish her every possible happiness. The parting between her and her husband was very affecting.

"The *Sea Foam* was towed down the river to-day, and we are now anchored for the night at Diamond Harbour. I have been much struck by the villanous-looking faces amongst the crew of the vessel. Many of the men came on board very intoxicated, and Captain Skeats says he fears he will have a rough time with them. The odious Behrens came down the river with us, and I was amazed to learn that it is he who has chartered the ship. Perhaps it is very foolish of me to attach any significance to that fact, but still I cannot help thinking that it is strange. I tried to avoid him, but he forced himself upon me. I never knew him to be so affable; though I am sure his affability is dangerous. As he was leaving the vessel he asked me to shake hands with him. I refused at first, but he said, 'You might as well shake hands, for I do not suppose we shall ever meet again.' I gave him my hand, and as mine touched his I thrilled with a nameless dread. A strange smile was in his face, and his eyes glistened. At the last moment, as he was going down the gangway, he said with great emphasis—'Good-bye; although you will never see me again, you will know before long that Samuel Behrens can be a good friend and a dangerous enemy.'

"I have been thinking over Behrens' words. What did they mean? I confess they have frightened me. And yet they were

probably only the stupid utterance of a stupid and vain man. Still I am sure, late as it is, I would have insisted on leaving the vessel if Caleb Skeats had not been her captain. But he is so brave and dauntless that I feel perfectly safe with him.

"I have made no entry in my diary for the last few days, as I have been suffering from sea-sickness. My dear boy has also been ill, but I thank God he is now getting better. The weather has been very bad, and Captain Skeats says his crew are a useless lot of rascals, and it seems as if Behrens had shipped the very worst men he could possibly get hold of.

"There was a violent altercation to-day between the mate, a man named Ralph Gordon, and Captain Skeats. Gordon is a sullen, brutish-looking man, and refused to obey some order of the captain's. He used frightful language, and threatened the life of the captain. I feel terribly frightened. God protect us.

"The crew have almost been in open mutiny to-day, urged on by Gordon. Captain Skeats threatened to shoot some of the men with his revolver. A sense of heavy despair sits upon me, and I feel as if my worst fears are to be realised. Can it be possible that the villain Behrens has arranged some cunning and wicked plot for our destruction? Heaven forbid! and yet I have a strong presentiment of coming evil. Gordon seems to have a special dislike to me. Why, it is impossible to tell. I never saw him before in my life till I came on board, and have scarcely ever spoken to him.

"For my beloved baby's sake I try to keep calm, but my fears will not be put down. Captain Skeats is terribly anxious, although he tries to conceal it from me. I ask myself the question, if it could be possible that my husband and Behrens have entered into a plot to destroy me and my child. The question almost freezes me with horror. Can men be guilty of such fiendish and diabolical cruelty? Alas! alas! I fear so. But if these fears are realised, surely Heaven will not allow the guilty wretches to escape, but will overtake them with a terrible and just retribution. In case of any evil befalling me, I put in record here my thoughts about Behrens. He is a Jew and a shipbroker of Calcutta, and he and my husband have been very intimate. I firmly believe that Behrens is wicked enough to commit any crime, and it is probable that he may have

bribed the crew to murder me. Hourly do I pray that, though my life is sacrificed, my child may be saved.

"There has been another scene to-day between the captain and his crew. Many of them had succeeded by some means or other in getting drink, and they were half-intoxicated. They threatened to kill the captain, but he daunted them by his unflinching manner and resolute bearing. Oh, is there no help for us? I am convinced now that something dreadful is going to happen. I hug my darling child to my breast, and pray earnestly to God to shield us. The weather is dreadful, and the ship behaves very badly, as the men will not attend to their duties.

"Captain Skeats, who has hitherto tried to seem unconcerned, told me candidly to-day that he feared the men meant mischief, but he says that he intends to alter the course of the ship and put into Madras.

"The captain attempted to bear up for Madras last night, but the mate discovered that the ship's course had been altered, and he told the men not to work the sails. An altercation between him and the captain ensued, during which he struck the captain, who knocked him down. With horrible oaths Gordon swore vengeance, and there is no longer any doubt that he is a dangerous and desperate villain. Captain Skeats has been teaching me how to fire a revolver to-day. I am cold with dread, but for my child's sake I feel as if I could be as remorseless as a tiger robbed of her young. Oh, it is awful, awful, this dreadful suspense. Lord, have mercy upon us!

"I seem as if I were going mad. The intentions of the crew are no longer disguised. They are a desperate lot of villains, and they boldly announce that the fiend Behrens has paid them not to let us reach our destination. Last night I wrote out a statement to this effect, and, putting it into a bottle, sealed the bottle up and dropped it overboard, in the hope that the sea will carry my message to the shore, and that if we perish man's vengeance may punish the scoundrel Behrens.

"I am growing desperate now, as I realise the awful danger that surrounds us. Captain Skeats tries to cheer me, and says they shall tear his heart out before they touch me. Fear for my boy is giving me nerves of iron. I can handle my revolver well now, and not for a moment will I hesitate to shoot the man who attempts to injure my child.

"I can scarcely write now, but I am making a great effort, so that should this diary, by any possible chance, fall into other and honest hands, it may serve as evidence of the deep-dyed villany of Behrens. I try to believe that my husband is not cognizant of this diabolical plot, but the belief will not take root. If he has had a hand in it, I pray to God that He will afflict him with some of the agony that I am now suffering.

"A great storm has been raging all day, and many of the sails have been blown away. I am ill and cannot write. My child is well, however, thank God, and knows nothing of the peril that surrounds him.

"The storm shows no signs of abating, and the crew are now in open mutiny. They refused to work this morning, and part of one of the masts fell overboard. Gordon, the mate, has shown himself in his true colours, and has only been kept at bay by the captain threatening to shoot him. One of the men confessed this morning that he and his companions had been hired specially by Behrens to wreck the ship in order that I and my child might be drowned. This man with two others have been bought over by the captain, and the four are now making superhuman efforts to navigate the vessel, but the other members of the crew are doing all they can to prevent them.

"During the night I was horrified by struggling and wild shouting and fierce oaths on deck, followed by two pistol shots. The agony I have endured cannot possibly be described. Oh, my God, my God, pity and protect me! What have I done to deserve such awful punishment? Captain Skeats has just been to my cabin. He looked wild and haggard. He said that some of the men, led by Gordon, attacked him in the night, but that he managed to beat them off, and shot one man dead. Oh, it is awful. Is there no help, no pity, for us?

"This morning I held my child up to the sailors, and appealed to them to protect me and my helpless babe. Some of them seemed touched, and promised that no harm should come to us. Gordon, however, has since been threatening them with death if they do not do as he tells them. Poor Captain Skeats is almost distracted. He has not slept for two or three nights. He is surrounded with enemies, and is obliged to watch them like a hawk.

"The wind has died away, but the ship is rolling about like a log. The captain says that she is making water, and that he believes that Gordon has been boring holes in her bottom. The men who were friendly to us have been bound hand and foot by Gordon's orders, and he threatens to throw them overboard if they show any resistance.

"I have passed another night of agony, that I verily believe has turned my hair grey. I am almost tempted to take my baby in my arms and spring into the deep. The villany of my husband and Behrens is so unutterably diabolical that I cannot believe they will be allowed to go unpunished even in this world. For myself I could die, and die willingly, but why should my sweet child be sacrificed? My strength is failing, and my brain seems to be giving way. Captain Skeats still bears up bravely, and encourages me to hope. He says we are in the track of ships, and must fall in with some soon. If we do he will keep the men at bay while I tie the ensign, with the Jack downwards, in the rigging, as a signal of distress. The captain's resolute bravery seems to have awed the men a little.

"This morning the men quarrelled among themselves. They had broken into the store-room and got out a cask of rum. The scene that followed beggars all description. They slashed and cut each other, and have almost completely wrecked the ship. Then some of them, in their drunken frenzy, lowered a boat and pulled away, but they had not gone far before it capsized, and they were all drowned. Oh, it is awful. I cry aloud to Heaven for pity and mercy."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE RECORD CONTINUED.

FROM this part of the diary the entries were incoherent, and the writer seemed to have been suffering under intense mental excitement. She had, however, made a mechanical effort to write her impressions, though they took the form of a mere jumble of words, in which fierce denunciations of her husband and Behrens were mingled with prayers for mercy and pity for her child. Gradually she seemed to have regained her senses, and the next readable entry ran as follows :—

“I fancy I must have been in a raging fever, or something ; for there is a blank in my memory. I know not what space of time it represents. The ship is now waterlogged, and there is little hope for us. Only a few of the crew remain, including Gordon, who is a fiend incarnate. Captain Skeats has been wounded, but he will not tell me how. He is sick and ill, and I have been nursing him. He says that Gordon urged the men to come aft and murder us, but they refused, saying there had been blood enough shed already.

“This morning the captain has been trying to persuade the men to assist him to clear the fallen spars away and rig up jury sails, so that we might make some port. They showed an inclination to yield, but were threatened by Gordon. Captain Skeats tells me that he is resolved to go forward to the forecandle and try to shoot Gordon, for by that means only can we hope to be saved. I would dissuade him if I thought there was any chance for us otherwise. But Gordon is a reckless, determined man, and the crew are afraid of him. Therefore, while he remains I am confident we shall not win them to our side. Through all this awful agony and misery my boy has kept well, but I find a difficulty in getting enough food for

him. As for myself, I am sustained by a false strength, but the mental strain is so great I am convinced something must give way soon. A feeling came over me this morning to shoot my child in order to save it from future misery, and then blow my own brains out. But when I raised my revolver I uttered a scream of horror, and, falling on my knees, prayed to God to give me strength to bear up yet a little while longer, for there may yet be a chance of our being rescued by a passing vessel.

"The culmination of the fiendish plot has been reached to-day. Captain Skeats went forward, and I believe a terrific struggle took place between him and Gordon. They were both killed. A little later the rest of the men lowered one of the other boats and went away. Before they went I prayed to them to save me and my boy, but they turned a deaf ear to me. Retribution, however, soon overtook them. The sea was very wild, and I saw the boat upset. I and my child are alone now, with only the raging sea around us; but it will surely be more merciful to us than the human fiends who have just met their doom.

"I crawled to the fore part of the ship a little while ago to learn the actual fate of poor Captain Skeats. The sight that met my gaze froze me with horror, and I must have had a fit or fainted. At any rate, I became insensible. How long I remained so I have no means of telling. It must have been some time, however, for my child was crying with hunger when I got back. I found that the captain was dead. He had evidently been stabbed by Gordon, but he had shot his cruel and cowardly murderer.

"I think I am mad; everything seems red before my eyes; there is a strange humming in my ears; and I feel as if my head were bound round with cords. I have managed, however, to put the ensign in the rigging, and I have gazed and gazed and gazed over the wild, glittering waste of waters in vain hope of seeing a sail. But, alas! there is only the pitiless ocean and the leaden sky. God has forsaken us, forsaken us!

"Another day has passed, a day of unutterable horror. Again I have tried to kill my child, but could not. Some unseen power seemed to hold back my hand. And yet it would be better that I did it, for my senses are leaving me, and when I can no longer attend to him he will slowly starve. Oh, God in heaven, it's awful

to contemplate, and yet it is such a fearful thing for a mother to have to slay her child while there is even the faintest hope. Perhaps some ship may sight us. O merciful Father! grant it. Do not let us perish.

“My husband’s face appeared to come before me a little while ago, and he seemed to smile and gloat over my misery. I uttered a curse upon him, and with my latest breath I will curse him. Two short years ago he found me a happy and contented girl. He tempted me into deceiving my benefactress and friend. He won my love only to destroy me. He has taken my heart, and, with fiendish cruelty, broken it into atoms. I believe I could freely have forgiven him if he had allowed his cruelty to stop with me. But he has extended it to our child, and for that I call upon Heaven to scourge him with scorpions, to wring and torture his heart as he has wrung and tortured mine. As it may yet chance that these papers will fall into other hands, I will put into writing, while I have yet strength, the following particulars: My husband’s name is Isaac Luck, and he is in the employ of Greth Brothers, the shipowners, of Liverpool. We were married in Calcutta. I was then living under the care and protection of Mrs. Gascoigne. I deceived this dear, good woman, and was married clandestinely. Therefore I deserved some punishment, but surely nothing so heavy as this. I loved my husband, and I believe he would have loved me had it not been for the man named Behrens. This man is one of the wickedest men on the earth, and I am confident it is he who has led my husband into this crime. But in Heaven’s good time a fearful retribution will surely overtake him. Should anyone find these papers, I pray, in God’s name, that the finder will place them at once in the hands of a magistrate, and that steps will be taken to arrest my husband, for I am persuaded that he wished to get rid of me and my child in order that he might marry some other woman.

“The sea roars around me, and the air seems filled with screeching demons. Some change is coming over me. What is it? Am I losing my senses? I believe I am; therefore is it not a duty on my part to put my child out of its misery? If I do not do that what will become of him if I die? He will suffer agony and slowly starve to death. Oh, it is awful—awful to contemplate.

My blood curdles with horror at the very thought of it; and yet what can I do? It is so hard for a mother to slay her offspring. I will wait. Surely Heaven will pity us and send some vessel in our way!

"I am growing weaker, and all hope is leaving me. My poor boy is not well, and he cries much. I wish that the Lord would take him, then I could die happy.

"Why does not the cruel sea engulph us? All day long it howls and roars and screeches, and yet it does not overwhelm us. It tortures but will not kill us. Oh, the agony. I strain my eyes until blood seems to come in them. But there is nothing but our battered vessel and the maddened, hissing sea all around.

"Once more I am tempted to kill my child. I think I will clasp him to my bosom and then plunge into the raging waters.

"I tried to jump overboard with my child, but at the supreme moment my heart failed me, and I fainted. I am very ill now. My brain is giving way. God has deserted me. I only ask that my child may die, but even that prayer is denied me. He lives on. What will his fate be if I go first? I dare not contemplate it, or I should become a raving lunatic. The only way I could kill my boy would be in a moment of frenzy. I cannot do it deliberately. My heart fails me. But the end is coming. I know my brain is giving way, and another few hours must decide our fate.

"I am so ill and weak now that it is with the greatest difficulty I can write. I believe I saw a ship a little while ago. Oh, if succour would only come! but I fear it will not. I shall write no more. I am going to put these papers in my waterproof sponge bag, and fasten it round my body, so that should anyone come on board after I am dead the papers may be discovered and retribution will yet overtake the villains who have planned my destruction. I am firmly resolved now that to-night when my boy is sleeping I will shoot him, and then shoot myself. I cannot leave him to the slow and lingering torture of starvation. If I do wrong in killing him I am sure I shall be forgiven; for I shall take his life only to spare him from a more slow and awful form of death."

This was the last entry made in the diary, and how long it was

from then to the time when the ill-fated mother and her child were rescued there were no means of telling. It is probable that it was soon after that the *Pearl* sighted the wreck, for Mrs. Luck expressed a belief that she had seen a ship, and very likely she had ; but she was too weak and ill and dazed to take any special means to ascertain. The writing of the last entries in her diary showed how she must have been suffering. The lines were straggling, the words disconnected, and there were evidences of intense mental anguish. The pages were much blotted, and the writing was frequently blurred with tear stains, so that in parts it was very difficult to decipher.

Mrs. Shadwell read through this record of a woman's shame and wrong and suffering with an aching heart, and her distress was intensified by the knowledge that the story of villany had been so long kept a secret. Her husband had tried to trade upon it, and had it not been that retribution had overtaken him it is strongly probable she would never have learnt the shameful story. She well understood now what the dying mother meant when she said that the papers would enable her child to avenge her, and avenged she surely should be if that were possible. But how was it to be done ? Mrs. Luck had said in her dying moments,

"When my child is old enough give him the papers, and let him avenge me."

That, however, was indefinite. Long before he had attained to years of discretion the guilty party might have passed from the reach of man's vengeance. Mrs. Shadwell thought of this, and she wondered what she ought to do. The revelation affected her health, and for three or four days she was confined to her room, and during that time she kept the dreadful narrative to herself. But the burden was too heavy to be borne alone. She felt that she must take someone else into her confidence ; that she must have someone's advice. The recovery of the papers cleared up the terrible mystery of the wreck and the dastardly conspiracy that had been resorted to to get rid of the mother and child. That conspiracy had been all but successful, and many lives had been sacrificed. But the adage that "murder will out" was fully exemplified here, and retribution might yet overtake those who had

planned the horrid deed. At last Mrs. Shadwell decided as a preliminary step to take Mrs. Skeats into her confidence, and reveal the story to her. Mrs. Skeats was bowed down and crushed for a time, when she learned how her brave and devoted husband had been sacrificed. The fears that she had so long entertained were at last realised, and she knew that her husband had been cruelly done to death.

Mrs. Shadwell's next step was to seek the aid and advice of her friend, Mr. John Robinson. She despatched an urgent message to his home asking him to come to her at the earliest possible convenience. His "earliest possible convenience" was the next train after the receipt of the message. He saw that Mrs. Shadwell was much distressed, and that she evidently had something on her mind, and as she hesitated to tell him at first what it was he almost involuntarily remarked,

"Have you had news of your husband, Mrs. Shadwell?"

"Yes," she answered, sadly. Then, after a pause, "My husband is dead."

John heard this news with surprise, but certainly not with regret. He had all along suspected and guessed that Mrs. Shadwell's last marriage had been an ill-assorted one, and John Robinson alone knew how keen was the anguish that suspicion had caused him. But never a word had escaped his lips in reference to the subject. He was a man who knew how to keep his thoughts to himself, and his thoughts about Mrs. Shadwell he had kept to himself for years. She had been his first and only love, and though time may have softened that love down it had never been able to entirely kill it. He was too honest to play the hypocrite even as a matter of form. Some men would have said when they heard the announcement about her husband's death,

"Indeed; I am very sorry to hear it."

But John was not sorry, and consequently he was not going to say that he was.

"The news, I presume, was scarcely unexpected?" he remarked.

"No," she answered, "I cannot say it took me by surprise."

"And—did it come upon you as a shock?" he asked, with some hesitancy. Then, as if sorry he had made such a remark, he added,

quickly, "Pardon, perhaps I have no business to speak like that."

"I have asked you to come here because I wished for your advice, John," she replied, as if anxious to change the subject. "I know how ready you always are to assist me, and I thought I could count upon your assistance now that I am in trouble."

"You have only to command me, Mrs. Shadwell," he said. "I feel it to be a pleasure and an honour to be asked to serve you, even in the smallest way."

She expressed her thanks and gratitude in a few earnest words, and then she told him that she had come into the possession of the papers, the loss of which had occasioned her so much sorrow. But in telling the tale she was careful to avoid saying that her husband had been the thief, though no doubt he guessed it, but of course he kept his thoughts to himself. She allowed him to read through Mrs. Luck's papers, and when he had finished their perusal he was very thoughtful, and said,

"This is a very serious matter."

"It is," she answered; "and the question is, what ought we to do?"

"One thing is certain," he replied; "the matter cannot be allowed to rest where it is. For your foster-child's sake we must take some steps. His unfortunate mother was sacrificed for some wicked purpose, and the villain who plotted her ruin and death must not be allowed to go unscathed. Have you any suggestion to make yourself?"

"No; I thought that you might do that."

"Then, perhaps the best thing would be to put the matter in the lawyer's hands."

"I am rather opposed to that," she returned; "that is, if we can avoid it for the present. I shrink from publicity; though, of course, if it cannot be avoided I must put up with it, for I must sacrifice myself to duty."

In speaking thus she was actuated by other motives than mere considerations of self. She was painfully anxious to avoid any scandal being connected with her dead husband's name, and equally anxious to avoid wounding the feelings of her aged father. She was conscious that her second marriage had been a foolish one, and had

been contracted in spite of evidence which told her that the union was not likely to be a happy one. Therefore she was naturally desirous to keep the matter from her father, if it could be done.

"Well, let me sleep upon it," John said; "and to-morrow I shall probably be able to suggest some course. One thing is clear, we must try and find out where the husband of the ill-fated Mrs. Luck is, and what his motive was for wishing to get rid of her."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IT TAKES A WOMAN TO WORM OUT A SECRET.

JOHN ROBINSON did sleep upon the subject, or rather he did not sleep, for he passed a very restless night indeed, which was a most unusual thing for him to do. But the fact is, his mind was exceedingly agitated with the news he had learned; and he racked his brain and puzzled himself trying to understand what the mystery had been between Mrs. Shadwell and her husband, for he was sure there had been some mystery. The way in which Shadwell had gone away, his long silence, and the reticence Mrs. Shadwell had preserved in reference to his movements, all pointed to some misunderstanding. It was only natural, therefore, that Robinson should try to find some reason for it. Was she dissatisfied with her husband or he with her, or were they both dissatisfied with each other? It was evident there had been no great love between them, and John was troubled as he thought how unfortunate his old sweetheart had been in both her marriages.

"Poor Blanche," he sighed, "I am sure you were worthy of a better fate. You ought to have been one of the happiest little women on the earth."

By the time that he had risen, and taken his morning bath, John had come to the conclusion that there was some serious business to do, and that in the interests of justice and truth it was important it should be done. The diary of the ill-starred Mrs. Luck left no possible room for doubt that she had fallen a victim to one of the most villanous plots ever hatched. It had been a villany that had stuck at nothing, since it hesitated not to sacrifice a good ship and all her crew rather than that the poor woman should escape. But there is a Nemesis that ever tracks crime, and though no doubt the arch-plotters had hoped and believed that mother and child would both sink into the great deep, which

tells never anything of its secrets, they had reckoned without taking certain factors into consideration. The opportune appearance of the *Pearl*, and the valour of her crew, had saved from the devouring sea evidence of a most condemnatory character.

John Robinson discussed the affair during breakfast with Mrs. Shadwell, and they agreed that some steps must be taken immediately. So, as a preliminary, it was decided that he should cross over to Liverpool, and call at Greth Brothers' offices, to inquire if anything was known there of a person named Luck.

It so happened, when Robinson entered the counting-house and addressed an inquiry to a clerk respecting Luck, that the person inquired about was himself standing near, and, hearing his name, he turned with the instinct of sudden fear, and, before the clerk could answer, he stepped hurriedly forward and said,

"Do you wish to see Mr. Luck?"

"Yes."

"Come this way, then," and Isaac Luck led the way into Mr. Greth's private room, taking care to close the door behind him.

"Do I address Mr. Luck?" Robinson queried, as they stood facing each other.

"Well, I am *a* Mr. Luck. What is your business?" answered Isaac, as he stood with his back to the fire and scrutinised his visitor keenly, and feeling by no means comfortable, for he was ever in dread and fear that some day a revelation of his guilt would be made, and he asked himself if the revelation was at hand. Robinson was somewhat puzzled how to act. He had not prepared himself to come suddenly face to face with the very man he was seeking. His idea was that by inquiries he might have discovered if such a person was known by the firm, and if so, he might by further inquiries have elicited some particulars of his career.

Robinson's confusion and hesitancy no doubt displayed itself, and acted the part of a danger signal to Isaac, thereby putting him on his guard.

"May I inquire, Mr. Luck, if you have ever been in India?" said John, looking fixedly at the man before him.

To be forewarned, however, is to be forearmed, and Isaac did not flinch under the steady gaze, but, with ready artfulness and unblushing effrontery, he answered,

"No. Why do you ask?"

Robinson was more puzzled and confused.

"Well, I have certain reasons for asking."

"And what are your reasons, pray?" This sharply, and almost sternly.

"You will permit me to keep those to myself for the moment."

"Certainly; but as my time is valuable, you will kindly permit me to enquire if your business is with me or somebody else?"

Robinson did not know what to do. He was certainly in a dilemma. The diary distinctly mentioned a person named Luck, who was employed by the firm of Greth Brothers. Here, then, was a person named Luck, and he was evidently connected with the firm alluded to, but Robinson could not bring himself to believe that he was the person he wanted to find, especially as he denied having been in India.

"My business," answered Robinson, "is with a Mr. Luck, who, I have reason to believe, once lived in India. If you have never been in that country it is possible you are not the person I wish to find."

Luck paled a little as he heard these words, and there was a scarcely perceptible tremor in his voice as he said, irritably,

"Why don't you state your business?"

He felt now that his fears were confirmed, and that danger threatened him. But he saw perfectly well that brazen impudence and unblushing falsehood might save him, or, at any rate, give him a respite.

"I am hardly prepared to state my business," Robinson answered.

"Then, if that is the case, why did you come here?"

John did not like the way in which this was asked. He felt as if he were being snubbed and sat upon, so, in his blunt fashion and with a good deal of force, he answered,

"I came here because I had a right to come. And I venture to think I have a right to expect courtesy at your hands, whoever you are."

"I am not aware that I have been discourteous, but when you don't seem to know what you want, nor what you have come for, you should not be surprised if you are treated a little brusquely by

a business man who does know his business. Business men in business hours do not like to be intruded upon for frivolous purposes."

"My purpose is far from frivolous," Robinson returned, with warmth, feeling much annoyed by the superciliousness of the other. "And if I am not misinformed the man I am seeking will hardly be disposed to consider my purpose at all frivolous; at any rate, if he does other people will not, that I will venture to vouch for."

Luck's face underwent another change, in which a sense of sickening fear was depicted, but it escaped Robinson's notice.

"Then you have no longer any business with me?" Isaac remarked.

"Well, I am not sure whether I have or have not," said Robinson, with deliberation; "at any rate, for the present, I will not waste any more of your time." This ironically.

"Stay!" exclaimed Luck, as a new thought flashed across his mind, and he felt it was decidedly to his advantage to know this man's errand if possible, and deal with him himself, rather than let him go making inquiries in other quarters, where some ugly facts might possibly be wormed out; "it is usual when a person calls at a business house, as you have done now, that he should at least state his name. Permit me, therefore, to inquire who you are?"

John was too honest and straightforward to prevaricate or dissemble. He did not even possess the necessary caution which is indispensable to one who would worm out secrets of crime.

"I am John Robinson," he said, bluntly, in answer to the question.

Luck sneered, and then, with a sarcastic smile, he remarked,

"Umph, not a very original name. The family of Robinson is a very extensive one, so that to simply remark that you are 'John Robinson' conveys no definite information."

John was more than annoyed at the way in which he was being snubbed, and he felt that the person before him, if he was nothing else, was certainly a prig.

"I am John Robinson, of the Retreat, Torbridge, Devonshire," he said, in a dignified manner.

"Oh, indeed. And now to come to the point, I must once more ask you what your object is in coming here?"

"Had you treated me with less superciliousness and more courtesy," John answered, "I might not have been indisposed to have told you. As it is now I decline, but shall take other steps to discover what I want to know."

A dark, sinister expression came into Luck's face—an expression that seemed to say, You are a menace and a danger to me, and to save myself I would not hesitate to strangle you, if the opportunity offered. He managed, however, to control his feelings, as he said,

"I am not aware that I have been either supercilious or discourteous; but when a man comes to an office and will not state his business, and does not even seem to know what he does want, he surely ought not to be surprised if he is treated brusquely."

"That may be your opinion," Robinson answered, sharply. "I wish you good morning." Then without another word he took his departure.

For a moment Luck was tempted to call him back; but he immediately asked himself, What good would that do? He was deadly pale now, and he fairly trembled as he recognised that in deeming himself secure he had been living in a fool's paradise, and now, when he was in the very act of reaping the fruits of his villany, it seemed as if vengeance would overtake him.

He had dared so much, suffered so much, and risked so much, that from his point of view it appeared hard that the cup should be snatched from him at the moment he was about to drink. He felt intensely bitter against his father for having delayed the marriage, for had he only been in possession of the fortune for which he had incriminated himself, he would have gone away and have sought some spot in the world where he might have been safe. As it was now he was without means, and to abandon the wealth he yet hoped to grasp was not to be contemplated. And yet, something must be done, but what was that something to be? He was living over a volcano he knew, and at any instant the volcano might overwhelm him. Were there any steps he could take which would render his position less insecure? He had to confess that he saw no way except flight.

For half-an-hour he was tortured with fears and dread that made him feel sick and faint; but then he began to review his position and his past, and he gradually became more hopeful.

"Behrens dare not betray me," he thought; "he has too big an interest in the stake; and it is almost a moral certainty that the *Sea Foam* went to the bottom of the sea, and every soul on board perished with her. What, therefore, have I to fear? To prove that I had any hand in sending the vessel away, or that she was lost by any other cause than unavoidable chances, would be a most difficult matter; in fact, it strikes me it would be utterly impossible. So what have I to fear? Pshaw! I have been frightening myself with shadows."

He had become quite lively again, and actually whistled as he reasoned thus; and which would have been sound reasoning if all had been exactly as he thought. But his son, all unknown to him, lived. The sea had spared him; but in his ignorance of this fact Luck brought himself to that condition of mind when he was enabled to laugh at his fears; and with a cheerful and light heart he went about his business once more.

In the meantime John Robinson returned to Tranmere. He felt annoyed with himself, because he thought he had somewhat bungled; and he was exceedingly indignant at the reception he had received at the hands of Luck.

He recounted to Mrs. Shadwell what had taken place, and she, with the quick instinct of a woman, came at once to the conclusion that they had got on the right track.

"You have been a little too blunt, John, I am afraid," she said, pleasantly, when she had reflected upon the matter. "If the person you have seen this morning is the Luck we are desirous of finding out, he would naturally do all he could to put you off your guard. I will see if I can discover anything more about him. You know when a secret has to be found out a woman can often succeed where a man would fail. Where you made a mistake was in going to the office and asking for Luck."

Robinson readily admitted that he had made a very great mistake, and in his admiration for Mrs. Shadwell he was equally ready to admit that she was infinitely more likely to succeed than he was.

The result of this was the lady went to Liverpool the next day, and, presenting herself at the office of Greth Brothers, inquired for one of the principals. She was referred to an old and confidential clerk, who had been in the service of the firm for many years. He

informed her that both the principals were absent through illness, but he was deputed to transact business on their behalf, no matter what the nature of the business was.

"I believe you have a gentleman in your employ by the name of Luck?" Mrs. Shadwell remarked, encouraged by the suavity and courtesy of the clerk.

"Oh yes; Mr. Isaac Luck. He has been in the firm from his boyhood."

"Isaac Luck," mused Mrs. Shadwell, "that is the man I want. Mrs. Luck's diary distinctly gives his name as Isaac." Then, addressing the clerk, she said,

"Mr. Luck has been in India, has he not?"

"Many years," was the answer. "It's only within the last year that he has returned home."

"He was married there, I believe?"

The question startled the old clerk, and he scanned his visitor narrowly, and made answer with considerable caution,

"I am not aware that he was. At any rate I know nothing much of his Indian career or his private affairs. But I am disposed to think that he was not married."

"Why are you so disposed, sir?"

"Well, the fact is—and I trust I am not betraying any secrets—the fact is I believe he is to be married almost immediately to the niece of the head of the firm. This has not been announced, but it is an open secret among the employés."

Mrs. Shadwell's face burned with suppressed excitement, and she began to feel now that she was getting the clue to the mystery. "This Isaac Luck had killed his first wife in order to marry his master's niece." Such was her thought, and with that thought the whole plot became clear.

"I presume, sir, that you would not countenance anything like villany?" she remarked.

"I should hope not," the man answered, quickly; and looking at her in surprise, and beginning to feel that certain gossip he had heard amongst the employés of Luck's "carrying on" during his Indian career were justified. He was not aware, of course, that Isaac was Mr. Greth's son, but even if he had been in possession of the knowledge, it is very possible he would not have entertained

any more respect for Luck than he did then ; for, in common with his colleagues, he felt a strong dislike for him—a feeling which Luck himself had inspired everyone with in the office.

“Then perhaps you will kindly assist me in unravelling a mystery in which I have the strongest possible reason for believing that Mr. Luck has played a prominent part,” said Mrs. Shadwell.

“If I can be of service,” answered the clerk, “pray, command me. I think it right to mention, however, that Luck is a great favourite with the head of the firm, Mr. Isaac Greth, who, I know, reposes great trust and confidence in him.”

“There is the more reason, then, why this young man should be exposed, if he has been guilty of committing a great wrong.”

“I quite agree with you, madam, but I should like to suggest, that perhaps it is hardly my duty to deal with a matter in which the character and reputation of this young man is involved. He is in no way under my jurisdiction, and I have not the slightest control over him ; therefore Mr. Greth might think that I had overstepped the bounds of my duty in listening to anything prejudicial to his protégé.”

“But surely,” exclaimed Mrs. Shadwell, “if this Luck has been guilty of the crime I have reason to think must be laid to his charge, even Mr. Greth would hardly attempt to screen him?”

“On the contrary,” answered the clerk, growing more and more surprised, “when you use the word *crime* you suggest something very serious indeed ; but whether serious or not, I can state most positively that Mr. Greth would not view with leniency anything that was not perfectly straightforward. He is so upright and honest himself that dishonesty on the part of any of his employés would be visited with the most uncompromising severity. I trust, both for the young man’s sake and Mr. Greth’s, that the suspicions you have raised in my mind have no foundation in actual fact ; but, under any circumstances, I must refer you to Mr. Greth himself.”

“And where shall I be able to see him?”

“He is staying at New Brighton. I will write his address down for you.”

Mrs. Shadwell felt now that she was getting in a position to carry out the dying wishes of the mother of her foster-child. The diary of the unhappy woman left no possible doubt of the guilt

of her husband. And that husband, fancying he had destroyed every trace of his villany, and that no clue could possibly be forthcoming, was about to consummate his wickedness by marrying the niece of his employer. In thinking this over, Mrs. Shadwell would hardly have been a woman if she had not felt strong and burning indignation. One of her sex had been brutally wronged, and a feeling of satisfaction came over her as she saw that chance had placed a weapon in her hands wherewith to smite the wronger.

Having procured the address of Mr. Greth, and thanked the old clerk for the information he had afforded, she returned to her home to deliberate upon the next step she should take.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

I AM VERY FAGGED AND VERY WEARY, BUT I AM NOT QUITE READY
FOR MY REST YET.

JOHN ROBINSON heard of the success of Mrs. Shadwell's visit to Greth Brothers with considerable satisfaction, and his admiration for her increased, if that were possible. This admiration found vent in the remark,

"Really, you are a wonderfully clever little woman," a remark that brought a stern rebuke from Mrs. Shadwell, who said,

"John Robinson, I thought you were not given to flattery."

"I do not flatter you," he answered. "I only pay you a deserved and justifiable compliment. When you and I were boy and girl together, I thought you a clever and wonderful girl, and now with the matured judgment of a man I consider you a clever and wonderful woman."

"John—"

"I am only speaking my mind," he went on. "For years I have had to keep my thoughts about you all to myself, but I see no reason now why I should not express them."

"You silly boy," Mrs. Shadwell remarked, as his words caused her face to burn, "you have always thought far too much of me. But now, what do you think I ought to do in this matter?" she asked, wishing to change the subject.

"Go and see Mr. Greth, by all means."

"Very well; then I will go to-morrow."

The following afternoon Mrs. Shadwell set off upon her mission to New Brighton, and on reaching Good Luck House, Mr. Isaac Greth and his niece Marguerite had gone for a drive. Of course she did not know this, and she inquired of the housekeeper if Mr. Greth was at home, and, being answered in the affirmative, she was

shown into the drawing-room, and in a few minutes Jacob came to her.

She was a little surprised when she saw the pale, wasted invalid, and her sympathetic nature caused her for a few moments to inwardly shrink from the task she had undertaken. But instantly she recognised that she had a solemn duty to perform, and however unpleasant it was, she must go through with it.

"You have a young man in your employ by the name of Isaac Luck?" she began.

"Yes."

"And I understand he is about to marry your niece?"

"Not my niece, but my daughter."

Mrs. Shadwell was slightly startled at this, and she asked,

"Are you Mr. Isaac Greth?"

"No. I am Jacob. My brother is called Isaac."

"I am a little puzzled, then, to know whether I ought to tell my business to you or your brother."

"What is the nature of your business, madam? If you will give me some hint I shall be able to inform you which of the two you ought to deal with?"

"It has reference to Isaac Luck."

"And what of him? Nothing serious, I hope?"

"I am sorry to say it is serious, very serious indeed."

Jacob up to this point had only taken a languid interest in his visitor, but now he roused himself up, as it were, and looking keenly at her, said,

"I presume, madam, you feel yourself perfectly justified in making that statement? It seems to me to reflect upon the good name of Mr. Luck."

"I am perfectly justified," she answered, with dignity.

"Have you had any relations with Mr. Luck?" Jacob asked, growing a little excited as certain suspicions flashed across his mind.

"No, thank Heaven, no," she exclaimed, warmly. "I never saw the man in my life, to my knowledge."

Jacob was sorely troubled in his mind, for his daughter was engaged to become the wife of his brother's son, and yet here was a person hinting at something serious against the character of that son. Jacob himself had never had a high opinion of Luck; in fact,

he had been very decidedly prejudiced against him ; and once when, on his learning by chance that Luck had been misbehaving himself in Bombay, he ventured to remonstrate with his brother for showing so much interest in an unworthy object. This remonstrance, however, brought down upon him his brother's wrath. Isaac had never before shown anger, and Jacob was hurt and astonished, and he resolved that never again would he attempt to interfere between his brother and that brother's protégé. Although he knew now what he did not know at that time—namely, that Luck was Isaac's son, he was by no means surprised to learn that there was something serious against the young man's character, though not for a single instant did he dream how terribly serious that something was. Some indiscretion, some youthful folly, some escapade at the most, was what he thought ; and thinking this he remarked,

"You say, madam, that you know something serious against Mr. Luck, and I will presume that you have well thought out the position you are placing yourself in. I would remind you that Luck is the affianced husband of my daughter, and stands in peculiar relationship to the head of the firm—that is, my brother. Mr. Isaac Greth has set his heart and soul upon this marriage, and therefore I would venture to suggest that if what you have to say merely relates to some boyish folly, that, in order to save the peace and happiness of a household, you should leave it unsaid!"

"Alas! would that I could do that," Mrs. Shadwell answered, with tears in her eyes ; "but I have a solemn duty to the dead to perform, no less than a sacred duty to the living, and a criminal must not be allowed to escape in order that the peace of the household should remain undisturbed. That would be contrary to all laws of justice. You and your daughter and your brother are to be pitied that fate has associated you with a man whose wickedness is appalling. But the truth must be told. I have in my possession papers which will prove that Isaac Luck was married in Calcutta, and for reasons that may be guessed, but which I do not clearly understand, he connived with another man, named Behrens, to cruelly and slowly murder his wife."

"Woman, are you mad, or is this an awful truth you are telling me?" exclaimed Jacob, looking ghastly and ill.

"An awful truth," Mrs. Shadwell answered, solemnly, feeling

wretched and miserable that it devolved upon her as a duty to make the terrible revelation.

Jacob rose and paced the room in great agitation ; then, suddenly stopping, he said,

"This is a horrible business, Mrs. Shadwell ; a horrible business, and if you wish your statement to be believed you must produce the most irrefragable proof in support of it."

"I truly grieve to say that the proofs I hold are irrefragable," Mrs. Shadwell answered, without in any way feeling annoyed by his doubting manner. Then she told him the whole story, beginning with the rescue of the woman and child from the wreck of the *Sea Foam*, and she placed in his hands the diary which Mrs. Luck had kept. He had only time to glance hurriedly over it, when a carriage driving up to the house warned him that his brother had returned. Jacob was excited, and his presence of mind had somewhat left him, otherwise he would perhaps have acted with greater deliberation. As it was, he jumped from his seat, and exclaimed,

"Here is my brother. Remain here for awhile, and I will break the news to him."

Before Mrs. Shadwell could interpose a word to stop him he had left the room, and, as the reader already knows, he hurried out and ordered his daughter to go into her mother. All through his life Jacob had been an excitable and hasty man, incapable of calmly facing trouble or difficulties ; whereas Isaac was capable of exerting wonderful command over himself, even in the most trying situation. He saw that something was wrong, and he said,

"What is this, Jacob, what is this ? You are flurried. Something has gone wrong."

"Yes, yes. Come in with me, and I will tell you."

He led the way into a small room, and then in his wild excitement he exclaimed, brusquely,

"This son of yours, this lad whom you have devoted your life to, is a villain."

"Jacob, have a care," said Isaac, as his already pale face became whiter.

"It is no use mincing matters," cried Jacob, "no use using a lot of words where a few will do. I repeat that Isaac Luck is a

villain, and for years has grossly deceived you—deceived us all. His hands are red with blood—the blood of his wife.”

“His wife!” echoed Isaac, with a blank look of awful despair in his pallid face.

“Yes, his wife.”

“Whence got you this information?” his brother asked, in hollow tones.

“From a source that there can be no disputing,” answered Jacob, still excited and almost beside himself.

“I will not believe it,” cried Isaac, recovering a little and speaking in tones of wounded pride.

“Come, then, I will place you face to face with the person who has made the statement.”

Seizing his brother's hand he almost dragged him into the drawing-room, and when Isaac saw a well-dressed lady who rose and curtsied, he was profoundly surprised, and began to think that his brother was either the victim of a cruel joke or hallucination. At any rate, he turned to him, and said,

“Jacob, you are ill and excited; please to leave me and this lady together.”

Jacob obeyed his brother now as he had obeyed him all his life. In fact, he was only too glad to get away. Then Isaac, quite collected, and with his business instincts strongly asserting themselves, turned to the visitor, and said,

“Permit me, madam, to inquire whom I have the honour of addressing?”

Mrs. Shadwell handed him her card, and when he had read it he held it between his trembling fingers, and said,

“I understand, Mrs. Shadwell, that you have made a communication of a very serious and startling nature to my brother?”

“In the fulfilment of a painful and unpleasant duty I have been compelled to do so,” she replied.

“If I am correctly informed by my brother, you have stated that Isaac Luck has been married?”

Mr. Greth asked the question calmly, but it was evident that he only kept calm by an effort of his iron will.

“Yes, sir. He was married in Calcutta, and there is proof in existence that he connived with another man named Behrens to put his wife out of the world.”

Mr. Greth staggered now, but it was a scarcely perceptible stagger, and he put his elbow on the mantelpiece to steady himself. Then he passed his hand over his scant grey locks, and his appearance was rather that of an animated corpse than a living man. The name of Behrens gave him the keynote to all, and by instinct he guessed the plot. There was a trembling of the nether lip and a quivering of the voice as he spoke now, showing thereby how cruelly keen his mental anguish was. The blow had fallen heavily, and yet he did not show it at present as many other men would have shown it. That powerful will of his enabled him to bear up.

"Mrs. Shadwell," he said, solemnly, "in making this revelation you are dissipating a dream of my life; you are shattering a great hope that I have cherished through long years. If you are cruel, I am sure you are so unwittingly, and are performing what you believe to be a duty. But I must ask on what grounds and why you appear as the accuser of this young man, Isaac Luck?"

"On the grounds of duty," she said, "and as an act of justice to Isaac Luck's son."

"His son," echoed the old man.

"Yes, his son, whose dying mother charged me to see righted."

"You knew his mother, then?" gasped Isaac.

"I did."

"Where—where did you meet her?"

Painfully and yet succinctly Mrs. Shadwell told the terrible story to Isaac as she had told it to his brother Jacob, and several times during the telling she felt as though she would faint, for her position was a trying one in every respect; and had she not been sustained by a strong sense of duty, it is probable she could not have gone through the ordeal.

Isaac listened, not altogether in silence, for now and then an audible sigh that was almost a groan escaped from his blanched and drawn lips. He still leaned heavily against the mantelpiece, and the whole time she was speaking he kept his hollow and bleared eyes fixed upon her. When she had finished her story he drew himself up by an effort of that mighty will of his, and with an unsteady gait he moved to a great arm-chair that stood near the table, and sinking into it, he leaned his head wearily back, and

his arms hung limp and motionless over the side as if they were palsied.

When he had recovered himself a little he remarked in a thin, weak voice,

"This is a heavy blow. It is a pity I did not die months ago." He paused, and then, with sudden energy, exclaimed, "No, no, it is not, and I thank God that He has spared my life. For I can now prevent a foul and horrible wrong being done to my beloved niece. You say, Mrs. Shadwell, that you have some documents in proof of the story you have told me?"

"Yes, sir, they are here. Will you look through them?" and she handed the papers to him.

He took them and placed them on his knee.

"Yes, I will read them, but not now, not now."

"Oh, I cannot part with them," she exclaimed, with some alarm.

"I only ask you to leave them with me until to-morrow, when I will return them."

"Can I depend upon your doing that?" she remarked, dubiously.

He straightened himself up a little, and said, with dignity,

"My name, madam, is Isaac Greth, and throughout a long career I have made it a study never to break a promise."

There was something so noble and honest in his bearing that she was sorry she had made the remark, and she hastened to say,

"Excuse me, Mr. Greth, I did not mean to hurt your feelings."

"No excuse is necessary, my dear lady. It was but natural that you should have felt anxious, and equally natural that my pride should have been a little touched. I accept these papers as a trust for twenty-four hours, at the end of which time they shall be returned to you intact. In fact, I will ask you to make it convenient to come and receive them from my own hands."

"I will do that, if you wish it."

"I do wish it, so that matter is settled. And now, tell me, please. Did I understand you to say that the son of Isaac Luck is under your care?"

"Yes, I have had charge of him from the moment that he was brought on board the *Pearl* from the wreck."

"Is he, is he a fine child, Mrs. Shadwell?"

"Yes, and a very promising boy, too."

"Ah," said the old man, with a great sigh, "I thought once that his father was a fine and promising boy."

"Are you very fond of the child," he asked, abruptly.

"Yes, indeed I am."

"So that it would be a wrench for you to give him up."

"That it would, a very great wrench. But still I should have to bear it, for it would be my duty to hand him over to those who have more claim upon him than I have."

"You are a good and noble woman," Mr. Greth remarked. Then stretching forth his hand he said, "Will you pardon me for asking you to leave me now? You see I am an old man and I am also an invalid. The news you have brought me has struck me heavily, and—it is not improbable it may accelerate my end. I shall ask you to come and see me to-morrow at this time, and bring the child with you. In the meantime, I will consider what steps it is my duty to take in this sad business. Excuse my rising. You will be able to find your way to the door, or perhaps you will ring that bell for the servant."

"No, that is not necessary," she remarked, as she took his cold and almost lifeless hand, and feeling alarmed by his general appearance so that she was induced to say, "Shall I ring the bell for someone to come to you?"

"No, no, thank you. Don't do that. I wish particularly to be left alone for a little while, in order that I may collect my scattered thoughts. Good-bye, good-bye, my dear madam. To-morrow, then, at this hour."

With some reluctance she left him, and when the door had closed he sank back again in his chair, and closing his eyes, looked as though death had touched him. But presently he raised himself up again, and putting on his old horn spectacles he proceeded to read the diary that Mrs. Shadwell had left with him. He took a long time to go through the pages, and when he read those parts that specially referred to his son, an expression of almost fierce anger came into his withered face.

He finished at last, folded the papers up, placed them on the table, and then lay back in his chair, looking very, very weary. His face was haggard and drawn. There had come under his eyes

deep, black rims, and it really seemed as if his eyes had sunk into his head. In appearance he had aged many years during the last hour or so.

It was very sad after his long life of rectitude and honesty, of his great aims and unswerving fidelity to a fixed purpose, that he should be so stricken now when his sands were all but run out, and that the things that he had yearned and prayed for should now, when he had come to grasp them, prove only a heap of ashes. His probity might have earned him better things. But so it was, and so it was to be ; and the great purpose that had led him on through all his lonely years was never to be accomplished. The daylight had faded out of the sky, and the gloaming fell, and soon deepened into the purple of night. And over the river rose the moon, ships flitted on like phantoms, and on the yellow sands the waters moaned and seemed in their moaning to say, "Dead hopes, dead hopes." But the old man heard them not. He still sat there, his scant grey hairs, tangled about his forehead, and his bloodless face wet with tears. And the moon rose higher, and its rays flooded the room, and fell on him until he looked as if he were dead—he was so white, so silent.

Presently there was a knock at the door, but he heard it not. Then the door was quietly opened, and a figure glided in, and with a smothered cry of pain sank down at his feet. And with that cry his dazed brain was awakened into life again, and, pressing his niece to him, he murmured,

"Marguerite, Marguerite, my beloved ; all hope is dead within me."

"Ah, uncle, dear, dear uncle ! tell me what has happened. I know that something dreadful has come upon us. Papa seems to have gone mad, and is in a raging fever, so that I have sent for a doctor. The housekeeper tells me that a lady has been here and has brought you bad news. Poor uncle, let me comfort you. Tell me what I can do ?"

Mr. Greth seemed to grow strong again suddenly, and the appearance of extreme decrepitude left him as he brought his iron will to bear. And there was something grand, noble,—something that almost amounted to sublimity in his manner as, raising her up he rose too, and said in a firm voice,

"Marguerite, my darling, for long, long years I have been trying to make a worthy mate for you, but I have utterly failed. Can you forgive me?"

"O uncle, don't talk like that," she sobbed; "what have I got to forgive? From my earliest childhood you have only shown for me the strongest possible affection, the most loving regard. You have heard something about Isaac. I will not ask you what it is. But whatever you command me to do I will do."

"Yes, I have heard something about Isaac—my son. His heart is black and false; he is too unworthy even to lace your shoes. You must see him no more. It is hard for me to have to shatter your idols, but it is better so—better a thousand times than that your heart should be shattered by a ruthless and designing husband. Go and comfort your father, my darling. Isaac will be here directly, but you must not see him; you must never look upon his face again."

"Ah, uncle, let me stay with you," she pleaded; "mamma is with papa; my place is here."

"No, my sweet pet, you must leave me," he said, tenderly, as he kissed her; "you shall spend half-an-hour with me before you go to your bed."

She caressed him lovingly, and then, in obedience to his request withdrew, and he sank back in his chair once more, and covered his face with his hands.

In a little while the housekeeper came in to light the lamps and draw down the blinds.

"Bring me a cup of tea, Mrs. Turnbull," he said; "and when Isaac Luck comes tell him he is to come and see me immediately."

Mrs. Turnbull said she would do as he desired. She also knew that something had gone wrong, and she saw how broken and ill her beloved master looked, and, with tender solicitude, she said,

"Had you not better go to bed, sir? You look very fagged and weary, and I am sure rest will do you good."

With a bitter smile he made answer,

"I am very, very fagged, and very weary; but I am not quite ready yet for my rest. I have a few things to do; I must do them,—I must, I must, and then, when my task is ended, I will lie down joyfully and sleep."

He spoke significantly, and his faithful old servant looked at him with a look of genuine sympathy, and then, unable to control her feelings, she burst into tears and left the room.

"This great sorrow touches all those who are dear to me," the old man murmured ; "why should others suffer for my mistake?"

A little while after this, just as the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece ceased chiming the hour of eight, the door again opened, and in a light and jaunty sort of manner Isaac Luck entered.

"Good evening, dad," he said, as he put forth his hand, but in an instant his countenance fell, and a deathly pallor spread over his face, as his father said, with sternness,

"Your hand, sir, must never more touch mine. Sit down, I have something to say to you."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“DUTY DEMANDS FROM US A FAITHFULNESS UNTO DEATH.”

AS Luck sank down on to a chair and looked furtively at his father, he felt and knew that all his deep scheming had failed to accomplish for him the ends he had aimed at. His heart, so to speak, grew cold, for hope lay dead there.

Mr. Greth was calm and dispassionate ; that is to say, outwardly he was so, for his iron will furnished him with the power of effectually concealing the true workings of his mind. But beneath that cold, pallid, marble-like face was hidden the pain and the anguish of a man who was forced to recognise as he stood on the brink of the grave that his life-long work was a failure. He had struggled nobly and manfully—ay, even heroically, to throw some light over the dark places of human existence ; perhaps in this he had succeeded, though he could not recognise it ; but his great and ambitious purpose to embody in his son his own lofty principles, his honesty of purpose, his unswerving faithfulness to integrity and probity, and his utter unselfishness of disposition, had absolutely miscarried.

“Boy,” he began, with awful sternness, and in the brusque and rugged way which was so peculiar to him, “boy, a revelation has been made which has proved to me that your heart is as black and false as that of the devil whom you have served. You, who are my flesh and blood, have laden my grey hairs with a heavy sorrow, and scared my heart with a burning shame. I who begot you blush for you, and feel defiled as I remember that you are my son. Had your conduct only affected me I might have tried not to loathe you, but the child whom I have worshipped, my niece, your cousin, is the victim of your perfidy and abominable wickedness. I tried to make her poor life a life of unsullied joy, but you

have rendered my efforts futile, and you have raised up for her a haunting demon of cruel sorrow; but, worse than all, your hands are stained with the blood of your wretched wife."

With a spasmodic effort Luck partly raised himself from the chair; his face bore the impress of agonising despair, his lips were drawn and blue; and speaking in a pained and jerky way, like one whose throat was compressed, he said,

"It is false—I say it is false. There is no blood upon my hands. I did not kill her." He sank back again with a groan, and, covering his face, shuddered.

With a burst of passionate energy which was altogether foreign to him, his father strode up to him, and seizing his wrists roughly, exposed his face, and as he looked full into the eyes, he exclaimed,

"Boy, are you or are you not responsible for your wife's death?"

Luck turned his eyes away—he dare not, could not look into the honest ones that seemed capable of peering into his brain and reading its most secret thoughts. But in a half-strangled voice, in a voice that was raspy and hollow and broken, he said,

"I did not kill her."

"You are splitting hairs," the old man replied, as he let go of his wrists. Then, raising his trembling and withered hand towards heaven, he exclaimed, with almost fiery energy, "Son of mine, I charge you in the name of all that is holy and sacred to speak the truth. Did you not bring about your wife's death?"

"I did not kill her," groaned Isaac again; for with the instincts of a cowardly fear, and from a sense of shame and horror at his own iniquity, he shrank away from the honest and just rage of his much-wronged father.

"You lie," Mr. Greth cried, with strong indignation. "You encompassed her death. You brought it about by your hideous machinations. But the sea gave forth its secrets. From the bosom of the deep there came the damning evidence that was to prove your guilt."

The old man suddenly paused, and clapped his hand to his head, as if he were overcome and giddy with exertion, but, making an effort to recover himself, he added, in a soft, tremulous, and sorrowful voice,

"Oh boy, Isaac, my son, why have you so stained your soul? Why have you wrung my heart into shreds?"

Those words, coming from the lips of such a man, proved how unutterably awful was the anguish from which he suffered. For him to display and give utterance to such sentiment showed that he was moved in a way that perhaps he had never before been moved in the whole course of his life. The hard business man had given place to one who was bowed and broken with a supreme sorrow. He sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. Isaac Luck still sat silent and motionless. He was like a man who had been suddenly stricken with some illness that had deprived him of speech and the power of motion. His face was of a creamy pallor, and his eyes were expressive of awful despair. It was at least something to his credit that he felt his position so keenly. It showed, at least, that dreadfully as he had erred he was not so hardened as to be dead to a sense of acute shame.

The passionate and fiery outburst of Mr. Greth seemed to have taken much of his small stock of strength, and he very feebly said,

"Have you no answer to make to the charge I bring against you?"

"What answer can I make?" whined Luck, in a scarcely audible tone.

"Have you no defence, nothing to say in extenuation?" continued the old man. Then he paused, but there was no answer; and he went on, "Isaac Luck, you must go away, and never again let me look upon your face."

"Do you mean that?" Luck asked, in a strange, hollow, despairing voice.

"Yes. I trust that I do not often say things that I do not mean. You have pierced me here"—and he laid his hand upon his heart. "You have brought disgrace and ruin upon yourself; you have outraged the unsullied honour of your sainted mother, and you have filled my fast fleeting days with the anguish of a cruel bitterness. I might have forgiven all this, but you have trifled with the most sacred feelings of my beloved niece, and you have shattered her earthly hopes. I cannot forgive that. Go. Between you and me is a breach that can never be bridged. Go, and try by a life of deep penitence and remorse to atone for the crime you have committed."

Mr. Greth's voice faltered, and his emotion was too assertive now to be overruled.

Isaac Luck rose, but he was so ghastly pale—he seemed so nerveless, so cold, that he was suggestive more of a mechanically moved corpse than a living man. For a moment he cast one pleading look at the haggard, drawn face of his father, but not a glimmering of hope could he derive from it. Then he moved across the room, opened the door, and passed out. A figure was crouched on the mat at the door. The figure rose as he came out, and the dim light from a swinging lamp revealed the tear-wet face of Marguerite. With a low, inarticulate cry she seized his hand and tried to detain him. But he drew away—not roughly, not unkindly, but rather as one who felt that he would contaminate with his touch.

"Isaac, Isaac," she moaned, in a whisper; "stay and let me comfort you."

He made no answer, though his lips moved as if he would have said something.

"God bless you; God guard and keep you," she sobbed, as he passed out of the house and was lost in the darkness of the night. Then silently Marguerite opened the door of the room, and throwing her arms round the neck of her uncle, who was sitting motionless as if he had been turned into stone, she burst into hysterical weeping.

"Be comforted, my child," he said, after some time, and when she had exhausted herself. "Be comforted. Life has many duties for you; many onerous responsibilities. I may not have taught you much, but I trust I have at least inculcated into you the lesson which I myself have tried so hard to learn—that duty demands from us a faithfulness unto death."

"You have, you have," she moaned, "and I will try to do my duty. But oh, uncle, if anything should happen to you how weary my life will be, how meaningless, how purposeless!"

He held her from him a little as she said this, and in his dimmed eyes there was something like a flash of anger as he answered her,

"Shame, Marguerite, shame, to talk of your life being purposeless and meaningless, because I, an old, worn-out man, go to my rest. I will give you a task to accomplish that if you do it conscientiously, as

I know you will, the many years that lie before you will be neither purposeless nor meaningless."

"I deserve your reproaches, uncle," she murmured, as, letting her head fall on his breast, she sobbed bitterly, and he unavailingly tried to soothe her.

And as she wept the cause of the blight that had fallen upon the little household was wandering along the beach like an unquiet spirit. There was a moan in the rising wind, and the waves broke in creamy whiteness at his feet. Over head the stars burned with frosty splendour, and a young moon made a broad path of light across the tumbling water, over which the ships sailed phantom-like, coming up out of the darkness, crossing that belt of sheeny silver, and then vanishing again.

Isaac Luck walked on like a man in a dream. He was hatless, for he had forgotten his hat when he left the house, and the cold wind blew his hair about his face. Sometimes the waves leapt at him and wet him through, but he took no notice; and his own shadow, thrown by the moon, seemed like another figure, a haunting figure, a ghost or a ghoul, that was driving him pitilessly on to his fate. Once he stumbled by putting his foot into a little pool of salt water, but he rose again, seemingly with difficulty, and still in the same aimless fashion he wandered on.

On, whither? He knew not. His brain was in a whirl. He was distracted. He knew that he was wrecked and ruined, and a terrible, maddening despair had seized him. The salt spray was hurled into his face, until his hair clung clammy about his forehead, but he heeded it not. He seemed insensible to external things. He was a lonely man on that lonely foam-strewn beach, and the Nemesis of remorse was scourging him with a whip of scorpions.

Perhaps his sufferings at that terrible hour did atone somewhat for his folly. And had he but listened to the pleading voice of poor Marguerite, when she said, as he left his father's presence, "Let me comfort you, Isaac," hope might have revived within him. But it was not to be, and, like one distraught, he wandered on without aim, and he knew not where.

Presently a broad channel, furrowed in the sand, and filled with the water of the sea, intercepted his progress. But he saw it not;

or seeing it, did not heed. He still went on, and there was a splash and a gurgle, and the night wind caught up a wail of human agony, and smothered it with its own shriek. Then the only sounds that filled the night were the shrieking wind, and the hoarse roar of the savage sea.

CHAPTER XL.

“I BUILT IT UP OUT OF THE DUST, LET IT GO BACK TO THE DUST
AGAIN.”

THE night wore itself out, and in “Good Luck House” the coming dawn was welcomed with a sigh of relief by more than one person around whom the shadow of an infinite sorrow had enfolded itself.

With wonderful self-command Isaac Greth would not give way nor display any external signs of the cruel wound the blow had inflicted upon him. But the silent watches were anxious hours indeed to him; for occasionally he was seized with a slight giddiness that he took as a warning, and he craved to live yet a little longer in order that he might complete the task he had set himself.

With his brother the case was different. Highly sensitive and nervous, without the iron constitution which characterised Isaac, Jacob had been grievously hurt by the shock; and he had raved in delirium during those long weary hours, and the doctor who sat with him expressed a fear that he would not recover. Marguerite bore up well. She was deeply impressed by her uncle's words, “Life has many duties for you, many onerous responsibilities;” and she determined, like a brave little woman as she was, to face these duties and responsibilities without shrinking. In attending to and ministering to the wants of her father she was fully absorbed, and prevented from dwelling too much upon her changed situation. She sorrowed, as was to be expected, but her sorrow was for her uncle and her father, not for herself.

As soon as ever it was practicable, Isaac Greth despatched a message to Liverpool to request Mr. Shepherd, his legal adviser, to come at once, and during the interval that elapsed before that gentleman put in an appearance the old man busied himself in

writing and making copious memoranda. He was conscious that the strength by which he was now sustained was a false strength, and that when the reaction set in he might break down and possibly die. He was filled, therefore, with a feverish anxiety to frame and put into execution certain plans that he had formed. He knew now that his hopes had withered, and that the dream of his life had vanished and faded away. His long years of toil had been exceedingly fruitful in many respects, but they had not brought him the one thing he had desired and yearned for. To see his niece married, and above all to see her happy, had been his all-prevailing thought; but now, standing with the burden of his years pressing heavily upon him, he was forced to realise that he had been mocked by a mirage. But it had passed, and the shadow of the grave was upon him. It was an awful, bitter thing to have to realise this; but his grand courage and his splendid manliness enabled him to stare the facts in the face. He had been crushed, but it was not for himself he cared; his thoughts were all for others.

When Mr. Shepherd arrived, Isaac Greth greeted him warmly, as a man who was capable of lifting a load off his mind.

"There have been great changes, great changes within the last few hours," he said, "and all my plans for the future must be changed in accordance with them. My son has failed me. I expected too much and have got too little, and I have told him that he must never again let me see his face. But"—the old man faltered a little here—"but I cannot be too harsh towards him. His conduct merits all the sternness, all the severity I could possibly show. Still you know, Shepherd, he is after all my flesh and blood, and his own conscience will torture him as long as he lives. He must not, however, be allowed to want, and I have decided to leave him a thousand a year. He has a son living—ah, I thought that would astonish you—and on that son I settle everything, with certain exceptions. I have jotted down all my wishes under various heads, and you will first of all destroy my original will. Do that at once, for I presume you have brought it with you as I requested; and then, without a moment's unnecessary delay, draw me up another will."

Mr. Shepherd listened with professional gravity to his client, who pausing for a moment enabled the lawyer to say,

"May I be permitted to suggest, Mr. Greth, without in any way seeming to be wanting in deference and respect to your methodical and business habits, that you should dwell a little longer upon this matter. I infer that your son's conduct must have been very grave to induce you to make such a radical alteration as to the disposition of your property, but I would beg to be allowed to remind you that second thoughts are often, if not always, the best."

"Mr. Shepherd, you will be kind enough to do as I wish you to do," Isaac replied, with great decision. "These thoughts I have given you are not second, but third and fourths, for I have worked them out during the dreary hours of the night. Had I been twenty years younger, I might have been able to go more leisurely to work, but time with me is exceedingly precious now. I have received a terrible shock, and I am afraid I shall snap suddenly like an overstrung bow. But you see that at the present moment my intellect is perfectly clear, and I am fully conscious of, and responsible for, my acts and deed. That being the case, I wish therefore to carry out my wishes before the power to do so is taken from me. You will see by these memoranda that I expressly and emphatically request that you will take immediate steps to dissolve the firm of Greth Brothers. The threads of that business fall from dying hands, and it is my dying command that no one else shall take them up. I called the business into being, and I dissolve it. I had hoped to pass these threads into another hand, but it cannot be now; and all my interests must be realised and dispersed, according to my instructions. It is a great work, and I shall not live to see it accomplished; but the keystone of my fabric that I have reared with patience and energy has been loosened, and already I feel that the pile is crumbling. I built it up out of the dust, let it go back to the dust again, and the firm of Greth Brothers, ship-owners, become but as the memory of a dream."

The old man was strangely overcome. The thought that the great monument of his labour was to be rent in pieces evoked an emotion that was altogether foreign to him. Mr. Shepherd, however, knew his client too well, and had too high a regard for his intelligence to dictate to him; and so he remarked, quietly,

"I shall respect your wishes in every particular, Mr. Greth. And I quite agree with you that it is better, under the circumstances,

that your original will should be totally destroyed; I therefore place it in your hands for that purpose."

Isaac took the will and tossed it upon the fire, and with the poker moved it about until every scrap and atom of it was consumed. Then with a sigh he said,

"Ashes! That is the end of all earthly things."

In a little while Mr. Shepherd had taken his departure, promising to return in the evening with the new will properly prepared. Then, yielding to the earnest entreaties of his niece, Isaac Greth consented to go and lie down in order that he might obtain some rest. This much-needed rest came to him, and he soon fell asleep; and when, some hours after, he awoke, he was much refreshed.

Later in the day, in accordance with her promise, Mrs. Shadwell arrived with Stormy Petrel. She had, with feminine taste and pride, dressed the child in his best, and he looked remarkably pretty and attractive.

When Mr. Greth saw him, he displayed no warmth or effusiveness; but taking him on his knee he placed his withered hand on the child's curly head, and looking fixedly into his face he said,

"He is a fine-looking boy. He may have the makings of a good man in him."

Petrel seemed a little afraid of the old man, and he cried to go to his "mamma." So Mr. Greth put him down, and he ran across the room and clung to his foster-mother's skirts.

"I owe you a debt of gratitude, Mrs. Shadwell," Isaac said, "a debt that I can never, by any possible means, repay. I don't know, however, whether you will consider I am showing my gratitude in wishing to remove the child from your motherly care. But my reasons for wishing this are very potent ones; and they have reference to the future happiness of a niece who is very precious to me. Without entering into details, I may be permitted to tell you that that niece was to have become the wife of my son; but the revelation you have made will entirely prevent that. Nature has not been very kind to her physically, and it is in the highest degree improbable that she will ever become a wife, this chance having passed away. And it is my wish that she will not. But as some compensation I want to give her something to live for;

some task that shall prevent her looking upon life as meaningless."

"I quite understand and appreciate your motive," Mrs. Shadwell replied, with deep feeling, for the old man's words had touched a sentimental chord in her breast; "and though it will be very hard for me to have to part from the boy, I must bear with it, for you certainly have a stronger claim on him than I have."

Mr. Greth rose and rang the bell, and when the servant appeared he said,

"Ask my niece to come here," and when, a few minutes later, Marguerite came into the room, he took her hand and said, "This is Marguerite, my niece of whom I spoke, Mrs. Shadwell. It would give me an exquisite pleasure if I could be assured that between you and her might grow up an undying friendship. That child, Marguerite, is the task and responsibility I told you I would give you. With that boy's character to mould, and his future to study, you will no longer be able to feel that life is useless. And Marguerite, I charge you solemnly to leave no effort unspared to make him an honest man. He will be wealthy when he comes of age; but you will teach him that wealth is only valuable when it is used for the purposes of doing good. A man who lives only for himself is a human canker; a curse to himself and the world he pollutes. Let that sentiment guide you, and be ever present with you, as day by day you seek to give his character shape."

The two women greeted each other. They were both much touched by the impressive manner in which Mr. Greth spoke. And Marguerite was fully conscious of the grave responsibility of the charge her uncle had imposed upon her; but she recognised also with grateful feelings the considerations which had prompted him to this course. Her dream of marriage was over, and never, never again would it come back. Soon her father and her uncle would have passed away, but she could experience no real sense of loneliness while she had this child under her care. To give shape and embodiment to all her beloved uncle's wishes, through the medium of this boy, would be to her a never-ending duty. That duty, in fact, was to make the child a conspicuous monument of the grand, heroic, and sterling nature of his grandfather. She grasped the situation at once. She saw the pure motives that stirred her

uncle, and she knew that he could pay her no higher compliment; give no more powerful testimony of the confidence he reposed in her, than by making her the legal guardian of this child. It was a great idea, a generous scheme, and in keeping with all his actions in reference to her happiness. He had tried to give her a husband, but he had failed, and now he had placed in her keeping the mind and heart of a tender human plant; and he showed his great faith in her in believing that she would train that plant in accordance with his own wishes.

With the consideration for others which was so marked a feature in his character, he turned to Mrs. Shadwell, and said,

"I shall not ask you to deprive yourself of that boy's company suddenly. The care and kindness which you have bestowed upon him fully entitle you to select your own time for severing the ties of affection that have grown up between you. In the hope, therefore, that you and my niece may come to appreciate each other, and to have a mutual and affectionate regard for the child, I shall ask you to allow Marguerite to visit you frequently at your home. The boy will thus come to know her, and, I hope, to love her; nay, he cannot fail to do that, for she has the disposition of an angel. Then, when you feel that the right moment has arrived you will relinquish your trust into her hands."

Mr. Greth spoke with great earnestness, and like one who felt that he was expressing a dying wish. The two women were much affected, and seeing that was so, the old man made an excuse to absent himself from the room for a little while. When he had gone, Marguerite, whose face was wet with tears, turned to Mrs. Shadwell, and said,

"I do hope and pray that you will come to like me. My uncle is so good, so noble, that I feel that to carry out his slightest wish is with me a sacred duty. He will leave me soon, for you see he is very old and very feeble; and when he has gone the world will be no longer the same to me. But he is giving me a great and splendid mission to fulfil, and I shall be more likely to carry it out successfully with your advice and co-operation."

"We will be friends; we will be as sisters," Mrs. Shadwell replied, as she took the hands of Marguerite and held them between her own, and gazed with tear-dimmed eyes into the pale, yearning

face. "Instinct tells me that I shall like you. I want a sister, a confidante ; I have had sorrows of my own, and yearn for comfort. I will find it in you. I have a fresh wound still in my heart ; you shall help to heal it."

They kissed each other, and each felt that if she had lost much she had found something, and that that something went a long way towards compensating for the loss.

CHAPTER XLI.

WHAT THE STARS KNEW.

IT was rather late in the evening when Mr. Shepherd returned to Good Luck House, the name of which might now have been appropriately changed to the House of Shadows, for a shadow deep and heavy had fallen upon it—the shadow of Death. Jacob Greth trembled on the brink of the unknown. He was in a comatose state—perfectly insensible; and the doctors said he could not last many hours. The shock had been too much for his enfeebled frame. Bowed and stricken with grief, his weeping wife and daughter watched the expiring flame of life.

Mr. Shepherd had prepared the will in strict accordance with his client's wishes. In it Isaac had made provision to allow his son a thousand a year, and five hundred pounds to be paid down immediately on the testator's death. On his grandson Mr. Greth settled a large sum, and he made Marguerite the legal guardian of the boy. In addition to this there were many legacies left to charitable institutions, and sums of money to all his pensioners.

Mr. Greth read the will carefully over, and, expressing satisfaction with it, it was duly signed and attested. And this business being settled he uttered a sigh of relief, and said that now he would be able to sleep. And it was while he slept in the dead silence of the night that his brother Jacob passed quietly away. The constitution long undermined by illness had been unable to withstand the blow, and so Jacob had died while far from being an old man.

Although his death had not been unexpected, the sorrow of those to whom Jacob was dear was very great. He was a quiet, gentle, and sterling man, and had endeared himself to all who knew him. Poor Marguerite was terribly afflicted, and it needed all her uncle's comforting to enable her to bear up.

"We must bow resignedly to these troubles," he said. "Poor Jacob has only gone a little before his time. His end could not have been far off under any circumstances. Events have accelerated it somewhat."

Those were sad and dark days that followed Jacob Greth's death. Wife, daughter, and brother were bowed down with overwhelming grief; but Isaac made no outward show of what he suffered, save in the drawn, melancholy look of his face. But it was only too evident that his vitality was sinking. His increased feebleness and tottering gait were unmistakable signs that his sands of life were all but run out.

Jacob was duly laid in his last resting-place. When his will was read it was found that his interests in the business were all to be realised, and the bulk of his property was divided between his wife and daughter.

Since that terrible night when Isaac had had the interview with his son nothing had been heard of Luck. Mr. Greth knew by reports from the office that he had not been there since, and the old man grew anxious, although he concluded that it was highly probable that, fearing the consequences of the revelations that had been made, Isaac Luck had fled from the country. And Mr. Greth instructed his legal adviser to try and take some means of discovering his whereabouts, in order that he might be informed that his father had made ample provision for him. And so, carrying out these instructions, Mr. Shepherd did take some steps, and these steps were the means of his coming to know a few weeks later that the body of a man, much decomposed, had been picked up on the Welsh coast, near Conway. The man was Isaac Luck, as was proved by the most ample evidence, such as his name on his linen, and letters and business papers in his pocket, together with his card case, filled with his cards. An inquest was held upon the remains, but not a tittle of evidence was forthcoming to prove how he got into the water. But the stars that had watched him on that sad night when, crushed and broken, he had left his father's presence, knew how, when he had plunged into the channel on the sands, he had closed for ever the book of his life, and paid the penalty for the many black pages he himself had written in that book, by dying while yet in his youth—dying while life might

yet have been full of promise ; dying lonely and heart-broken, with never a human being near to utter a single word of comfort, but only the angry sea roaring in his ears, and the shrill wind smothering his agonised cry of despair. The stars knew this ; and they had seen the stilled form of the wretched youth lying in the quiet pool until the rising tide came up, and retiring, carried back with it all that was mortal of Isaac Luck. But the stars kept their secret. And in the charity of his heart, Mr. Shepherd resolved to keep secret from Mr. Greth the fact that his son had passed beyond the sphere of man's praise or blame. Mr. Shepherd saw that his client's days would be but few now, and he deemed it more merciful to withhold from him this sad news, and not shorten his life by one single hour. And so the old man remained in ignorance of his son's fate, and in his heart he was always hoping that the lad would yet send him some news of his whereabouts and his doings.

The inactivity that his increasing infirmity imposed upon him was painfully irksome to Isaac Greth, and one day he announced his intention of going once more, and for the last time, to his office. His loving niece protested, but her protests being unavailing, she insisted on accompanying him.

He was deeply and visibly affected when he once more beheld the familiar building, and the well-known faces of his employes. In the private room where he had so long guided the destinies of the great firm, he sat a feeble, worn, stricken old man. And he noted that a clock which stood on the mantelpiece, and which had gone with unvarying regularity for many years, had stopped. And he murmured,

"It marks the end ; it marks the end. Like me, it is a worn-out piece of mechanism. But it has fulfilled its purpose."

It was a singular circumstance, and one which might have afforded Mr. Greth a certain satisfaction, that since his absence the business seemed to have gone all wrong. The fortunes of the firm had reached their zenith, and appeared to be declining, now that the marvellous brain that had guided them was no longer able to direct. One by one the employes were called in to shake the nerveless hand of the old master, and receive from him a cheque, the amount of the cheque being proportioned according to the rank

of the person in the firm, and his length of service. But in each case the cheque was a handsome one. Mr. Greth adopted this mode of rewarding his faithful servants rather than that after his death they should be subject to the law's delay. Then came the final leave-taking. Mr. Greth knew too well that his task was ended now, and never again would that building hear the sound of his voice or the tread of his foot. All things must pass and end, and the end for him had come. For once his strength of mind failed him, and losing all command over himself he wept like a child. Marguerite comforted him as best she could, and leaning heavily on her shoulder, and supported on the other side by an old faithful clerk, he allowed himself to be led to the carriage that waited for him at the door. He was so feeble that he could not walk on board of the ferry-boat, and two strong men carried him. He was very silent all the way back, but when he was once more under the roof of Good Luck House, he asked to be placed at the window, where he could see the river and the ships. And he sat there gazing long and earnestly, but it was with a vacant gaze. At his feet Marguerite sat, with his cold, limp hands clasped between hers. Once or twice she spoke to him, but he made no reply, until at last as the daylight was fading he said, speaking absent-mindedly, and in a voice that did not rise above a whisper,

"It grows dark, and I am very weary. Let me go to rest."

They were the last words he was ever to utter, for a few minutes later his chin fell forward on his breast, and he breathed stertorously. Marguerite alarmed the house with a cry of despair, and loving hands carried him up to bed. The medical man was sent for immediately, but when he came he saw at once that human skill could avail nothing.

Through the awful hours of that heavy night Marguerite sat by her beloved uncle, holding his hand, and straining her ears to catch the lightest whisper, but no word came to her. And as the river was growing grey in the wan light of the early dawn, she bowed her head and wept, for the cold and heavy hand that rested in hers told her too surely that the rugged, honest man, whose idol she had been, had passed away from the scenes of his earthly toil.

So died old Isaac Greth! It was a peaceful and fitting end to

a long life of patient labour and sterling integrity. He died as he wished to die. There had been no disease, no long and painful illness, but the machinery being worn out it very gradually stopped. In accordance with his oft-expressed desires, and the terms of his will, he was buried in the plainest possible manner. A simple slab of slate marks his grave, and the inscription on it is—

Here sleeps

ISAAC GRETH, SHIPOWNER,

Died —, aged 75.



"HE WAS A MAN WHO LABOURED FOR LABOUR'S SAKE,
AND DUTY WAS HIS WATCHWORD."

The loss of her uncle was a loss which Marguerite Greth alone knew how heavily it weighed upon her. But she had learnt patience and resignation. He himself had taught her the grand lesson, and in the care of his grandchild she found her loving duty, and strove with great earnestness to carry out her uncle's dying commands. In Mrs. Shadwell she had gained a true friend, who was at once a comforter and adviser.

It was soon after Mrs. Shadwell had entirely given up Petrel to the care of Marguerite that John Robinson said to her one day,

"Blanche, don't you think a very faithful lover ought to be rewarded?"

She knew what he meant. She knew his noble devotion, how true he had been, how his admiration for her had never ceased. So she did not prevaricate in her answer, which was,

"John, if you truly think your happiness is centred in me; if you really believe I can add anything to the brightness of your life, I will be your wife. I do not think I am worthy of you, but if you think otherwise I will endeavour by loving devotion to make some amends for having jilted you in the years gone by."

"All things come to those who wait," he said, quietly, as he folded his arms around her, and kissed her warmly. "I have always said that there was but one woman in the world I would care to have for my wife, and if I did not get her I would have no other. I have waited for you, and have ever been hopeful, for somehow I

have had a kind of presentiment that I should win you at last. My hopes are realised, and the dear old home in Devonshire will now have a mistress."

They were very happy those two. John had never known any sorrow but what she had brought him years ago; but she had suffered much, though fate had treated her kindly, for it had brought her at last to the only man she had really loved.

Something yet remains to be told about one other person who has figured in this story, and that something is best told by the following paragraph, which is taken from a Calcutta paper:—

"Mr. Samuel Behrens, who was one of the most prominent figures in Calcutta, met with a fatal accident late last night as he was driving up from Garden Reach. The horse he was driving was a young and spirited animal which he had only purchased a few days before, and in passing Fort William it suddenly took fright and dashed off at tremendous speed, until it came in collision with a bullock cart. The shock caused Mr. Behrens to be pitched out, and falling on his head he was killed instantly. The syce escaped unhurt, but the horse, which was a very valuable one, was so injured that it had to be shot. Mr. Behrens leaves a wife and family to mourn his loss."

The firm of Greth Brothers, shipowners, Liverpool, is known no longer, save as a record of past things. With the death of the two partners the business was dissolved, and its various threads and links were broken and scattered. But the name of Isaac Greth is yet remembered with honour in the great shipping city; and it is enshrined with loving regard in the heart of Marguerite, his niece; and his noble nature lives again in his grandson, a young man now who, under the care and training of his dutiful guardian, is destined to fill a prominent and worthy place in the world, for she has taught him the lesson, and he has learned it never so well, that "Duty demands from us a faithfulness unto death."

THE END.

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